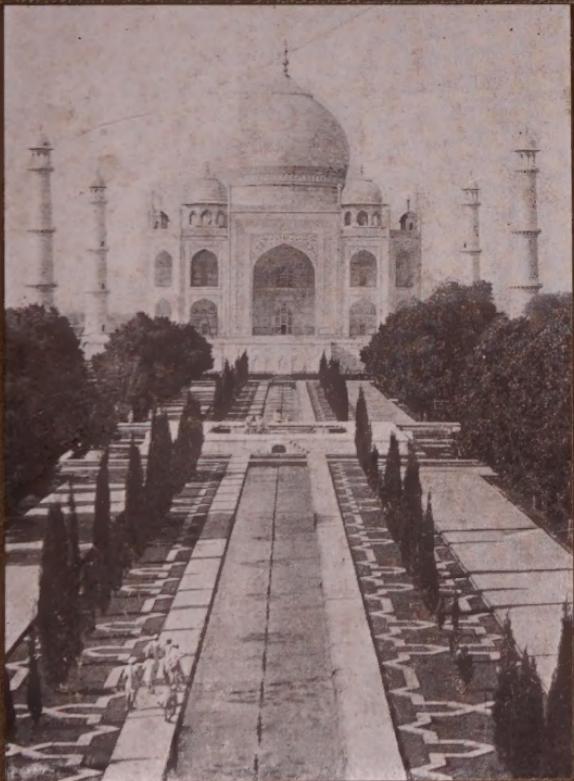


My Lady of the Indian Purdah

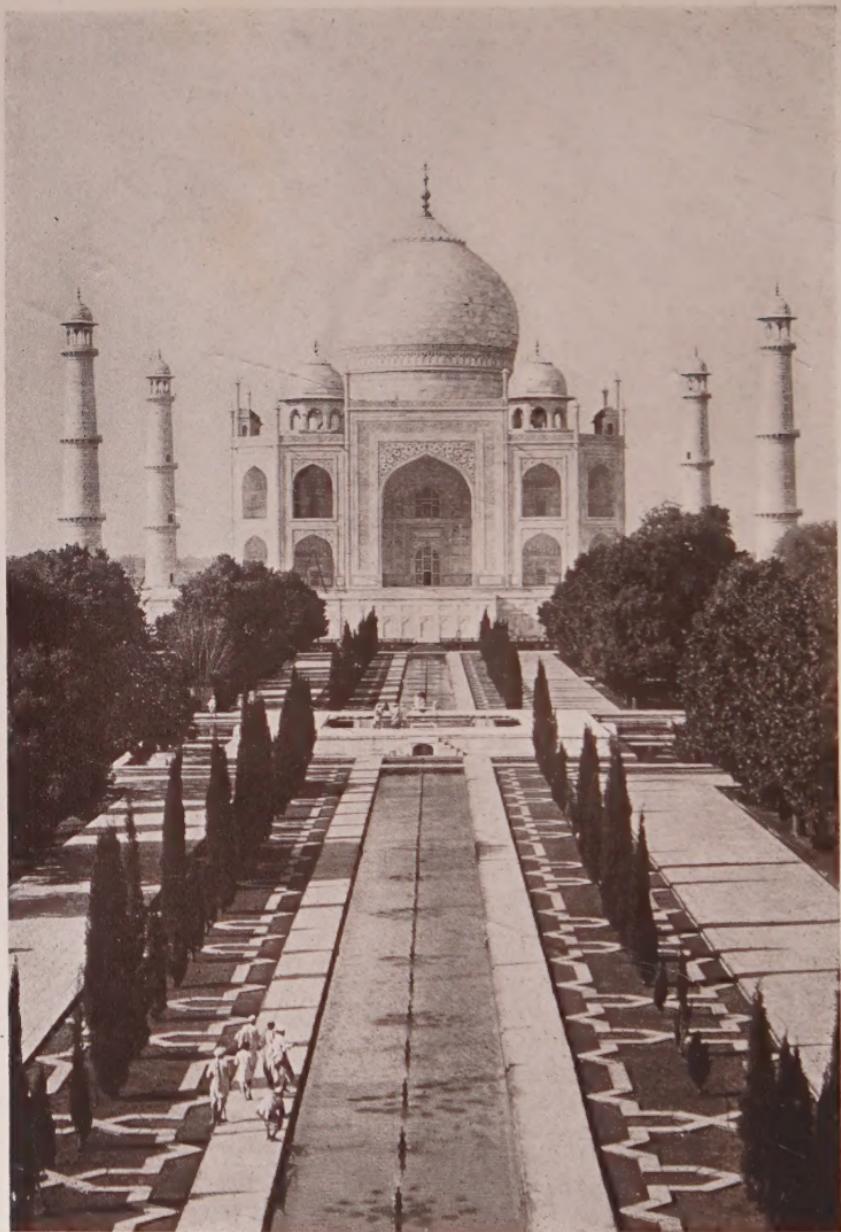


Elizabeth Cooper

MY LADY OF THE
INDIAN PURDAH



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THE *Taj Mahal at Agra has been
called the "most perfect piece of
architecture in the world."*

My Lady of the Indian Purdah

BY

ELIZABETH COOPER

*Author of "My Lady of the Chinese Courtyard,"
"The Heart of O Sono San," etc.*

*WITH FIFTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS IN
DUOTONE FROM PHOTOGRAPHS*



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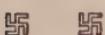
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MY LADY OF THE
INDIAN PURDAH

PROLOGUE

PROLOGUE

I


E who reads this will say,
“What does she know of
life? She, a woman, guard-
ed behind the purdah, shel-
tered within the women’s
quarters of a palace?”

I will answer, “What is life? Life is birth and youth, love, age and death, and they are all here behind the marble screens as well as in the world outside. We love and hate, laugh, suffer and despair and feel we are a part of the great universe, although giant gates made of custom and tradition, which guard more surely than if made of wood and iron, keep us closely within boun-
daries through which we dare not pass.”

II

Why should I not write of life! I have looked upon it in all its phases, in all its

changes as it moves slowly onward from the cradle to the grave.

I have held a child in my arms when it gave its first feeble cry to the world. I have felt its tiny, groping fingers clutch my heart-strings and cling tighter and tighter as the years went on.

I have seen the child grow to youth—youth which comes with high resolves but which stops before the feebleness of human actions; youth, which is always searching for the unattainable—the land that lies just before it, which is ever urged by a restless spirit, impatient, endeavoring to break through the net of life, living in a land of dreams, beholding beauty everywhere and gazing at the world with smiling eyes.

Then there is Love, who comes with silent steps to dwell with youth. Love, whose wonderful flower blooms at the very heart of life and hovers round it like a fragrance when youth is passed.

Love, it is of love I would write. Love, that is like a fountain in a garden, a well

of water in a thirsty desert, and all who will may drink. And youth is the cord that draws the wine most sweet from out this well of love.

I, who write of love, have never felt a lover's hand clasp mine, nor felt a lover's kiss upon my lips, yet I have heard the Divine Flute Player as he spoke music to the night, and although his songs were not for me, they were for one I loved more than myself, and in the joy of her joy, the strings of my harp of life were made to thrill with sweetest melody.

III

'Age has come to me, has stilled the fever of life, but it has brought me a treasure, the leisure to count the days that are past, to cherish in my heart what my hands have lost, and the thought of those happy days clings to me like mosses round an old tree.

Age is like a deserted palace where only memories remain, but my memories are

beautiful. We can not keep the gold of yesterday, but we can bask in the after-glow of vanished hours. We, of the yesterdays, cherish within a golden casket the flowers of the past that may be faded to other eyes, but to us they are still fragrant with rare perfumes that we alone recall.

I am not now in the Court. My gracious mistress has allowed me to leave the noise and restlessness, the quarrels, intrigues and bickerings of a thousand idle women, and come to this haven of rest and quiet, where blessed silence succeeds blessed silence, where the only sound is the liquid murmur of the water through the darkness of the night, and where by day the earth hums to me from the distance like a woman at her spinning-wheel.

Ah, me!—these blessed days and nights which are mine own, where I can dream in this quiet world of peace and beauty! And my dreams are velvet-breasted.

I live alone with my memories. Memory, which is like a pair of wings to our

dreams, transporting our hearts to the past.

Like pearls we thread in a dream, that past comes to me, and I will write it down. I will tell of a great love. Of a woman's sacrifice because of that love. Of a nation's gain because of that sacrifice. It will make the past live again for me.

IV

I cannot give my tale as do the strolling players who come to the courtyards and tell us women stories of bygone days, but I will tell it in my own way.

Perhaps at times my thoughts will wander into by-paths that stray far from the main roadway. I will think of the hills in far-off Cashmere, where as a girl I lived with my young Princess before she came as bride to the great Maharajah.

As I watch the red sun go down, from my palm-thatched cottage here by the water-side; as I see it flood the water with its glory, then turn to gray until there comes

the afterglow, and sky and water are like a golden flame, it will bring to my remembrance that life's evening has its afterglow, that after every sorrow there is peace. I may talk of life and death, which will make me speak of temple bells and floating incense and of the gods who rule our destiny.

The tongue of age is garrulous and does not go directly to its goal, but twists and turns and covers many a league in one short journey. But as all roads lead to Delhi, so all my paths will merge into one and bring me again to those dear days filled with the perfume of her I love, My Royal Mistress.

THE STORY

MY LADY OF THE INDIAN PURDAH

THE STORY

I



HE great cannon from the palace wall boomed a message so that all the world might know the tidings.

The men, sitting before their doorways, watching their naked babies playing in the sands, stopped their talk to listen. The women, dressed in their gay reds and yellows, their bare brown arms with bracelets as their only covering, stopped in the act of lifting water-jar to hip or shoulder. Their kohl-blackened eyes turned towards the palace from which came

the sound that caused all within the royal city to stop their toil and listen.

One—they counted. Then, *two*—loudly the cannon spoke its message. After a moment, *three*—they murmured.

Every one was silent, waiting for the next sound, but nothing came from the palace walls, and the little cloud of smoke floated away in the evening air.

The men again placed pipes to lips. “Only a girl,” they said. The women picked up water-jars and drew together in little groups. “Only a woman-child,” they whispered, and in low voices discussed the birth of the first-born of their Overlord.

II

In the women’s quarters of the palace which overlooked the city, there brooded an air of hushed expectancy. Whether the women were in their own apartments or in the shaded archways of the courtyards, or idling in the baths or gardens, when the

first gun boomed forth, they stopped their chatter and not a sound was there to break the silence. Like the women at the well they counted—*one*—then *two*—then *three*.

A rustle ran through all the palace. “A woman-child,” they also whispered, then settled back to their tasks, some to their broidering, others to the weaving of the marigolds with which they decked their gods, others to their gossip or to the decoration of their pretty faces.

The Queen had given birth to a woman-child. It was not worth their envy.

III

Within the room set aside for the bringing of new life into the palace world, my Princess lay surrounded by her women, her great black, wondering eyes wide with pain, her tiny fingers feebly fluttering in my hands. Her eyes looked longingly towards the door, and I, who knew her every thought, bent to her lovingly. All within

the room knew that the hours were numbered for the little Queen who lay there and no wish must be denied her.

“Nanda!” she whispered. “Nanda!”

I turned to a waiting-woman and, after a moment, the Maharajah came to the archway. The fluttering hands left mine and reached towards the boy who swiftly knelt before her. He caught the hands in his and held them close as he looked into the eyes that his keen eyes of love could see would soon be closed to him. A smile came to the lips of the girl-wife, and she released one hand and groped for his face.

“Nanda,” she whispered, “where art thou? It is day, yet I cannot see thee clearly.”

He touched the tiny fingers with his lips and after a moment she said :

“Put thy hand upon my head, my lord; it gives me rest.”

“Natara, Natara!” the Rajah cried. “Thou art my breath, my life, my water in the sand! Thou must not leave me!”

Her voice was like a softened sob, yet a smile was in her eyes as she said:

“My Nanda, if I had passed the Land of Shadows, thy voice would call me back.”

She lay so still that only the faint flutterings of her breath told that she yet lived. Again she opened wide her midnight eyes and said:

“My loved one, do not sorrow. I have had my great desire. The gods have granted me the thing for which I longed, and I have lived. Thy voice has comforted me, thine arms have been my joy, and when dreams have come I turned and touched thy hand and stilled my fright. And now—now—I have given thee a child.”

The Rajah brushed the damp curls from off her forehead and waited for the faltering voice to speak again. At last she said, so softly he could scarcely hear her:

“Dear Lord, I will take my rest in safety. I shall wait for thee, because I am my beloved’s through all eternity.”

She was quiet for a moment and then she tried to smile.

“Perhaps the gods take me to themselves for the sin of worshiping thee instead of them. Thy voice of love was sweeter in my ears than prayers.”

The Rajah pressed her to him in an agony of sorrow. She pushed the turban from his forehead so that she could look more clearly into his eyes, and said :

“Nanda,” and in her eyes was the look of other worlds, “Nanda, thou shalt for a time become heavy with sorrow, but afterwards thou wilt live in the memory of our love and that memory will become sweeter with the passing years.”

“My beloved,” the Rajah whispered, “I will not be far from thy door, my head will forever rest upon thy threshold.”

She raised her heavy, saddened eyes.

“I would see our child, my lord, I would see it in thy arms.”

The child was brought and laid within



*DEVOUT Hindus come to the mighty
Ganges to bathe and pray.*

the Rajah's arms. The mother touched the tiny face with finger-tips.

"Take my baby, my Natara," she said. "Another Natara for thee to love and guard. She is my gift of love to thee."

He answered:

"She will be the breath of my breath, the heart of my heart. Thou needst not fear for her."

The mother was quiet, caressing the tiny face, fondling the dark head that nestled within the curves of the father's arm. All the magic mystery of motherhood was in the dark eyes.

"She is but a woman-child, a flower drifting on the flood of the river."

Then she looked into the Rajah's eyes, and her own were eager, pleading.

"Nanda," she said, "our child of love is born a Princess, to be used as a pawn in the game of life. Promise me," and she turned to me, "promise me, you two who love me, promise me she will have love. Not power, nor rank, nor wealth, but let her know the

love that we have known—for love is life in all its fulness. It will open for her the doors of everlasting happiness. Without it she will drink deep of the bowl of sorrow. O Nanda,—Amina,—promise. Bring my baby love and love alone.”

The Rajah bent towards the Queen and said with voice that trembled in its earnestness:

“My Heart of Rose, I promise thee. Love is her birthright, and she shall have it.” He straightened his bent form and stood upright. “I am the King, Natara. Nanda, the King, and I promise thee.”

She looked for a long moment into his eyes, and then she turned to me.

“Take my baby, Amina. Thou hast passed all thy life within a palace, thou understandest. Guard her—keep her—” Then the soft voice faltered and only the great black eyes spoke to me.

I bent close to her so that she alone could hear.

“She shall be closer to me than the vein

within my neck, she will be my child, mine own. No harm shall come to her."

A smile of contentment came to the young Queen's face. She lay quietly for a moment, then she raised her eyes, that looked like some blurred tapestry, to those of the Rajah, who was kneeling by her side, and whispered:

"Touch thy lips unto mine eyes, my lord, and bring me sleep."

Soon she slept as a tired child sleeps when one sways the cradle.

IV

Thus did my Princess come to me. It was the dawning of my real day when I held the baby within my arms. A breath of motherhood came to me and changed my world.

V

'At first, when the sun was taken from the Rajah's sky, he was inconsolable. He

was like a land whose harvest had been reaped. With night in his soul, he shut the gates of the world and lived alone with his sorrow. But the fetters of youth are strong, and the boy became a man. Love does not die when the loved one dies; it simply finds a new mode of expression, and Nanda covered the world with the shadow of his love. He devoted himself to the affairs of his kingdom until he was known throughout all India as "Nanda the Just, the Kind," and the Prince who loved his people. All heads bowed to him in respect and love.

The red rose of passion bloomed no more for him. He did not choose another Queen. He sent for the son of his brother and made him heir to the throne, as a woman could not reign within the kingdom.

Although Natara could never be the queen of his kingdom, she was queen of the Rajah's heart. Her mother's apartments were given her. Guards were placed at

the archways and ever bowing women, whose hands were joined in perpetual salute, served her with noiseless steps. She held her own small court, where only children of noble blood were bidden to entertain the Princess.

It was the Rajah's pleasure to see her dressed in the most beautiful fabrics that came from the Imperial looms. Her saris were of the rarest silks, with embroideries of gold and silver. She was decked with pearls and gems of untold value. All India was searched for jewels with which to enhance her beauty. The Rajah would have taken the half moon's silver for a covering for her feet if that were possible.

As she grew older, poets sang of the ivory of her face with its touch of rose at cheek and lip. She was likened to the lily, and her grace to the fresh reed bending over the rivulet. In their songs they said that seeing her was like breathing the warm, sweet breath of spring, and that her passionate, dreaming, wistful eyes were dark

and deep as mysterious skies. If court poets could be believed, all the beauty of Indian womanhood was to be found within one small body. And it was true. My Princess had a beauty that caught your breath when she passed by.

Yet with all the flattery, Natara remained as simple as a child, loving the beautiful silks and satins, taking joy in the great strings of pearls and emeralds and rubies that were placed before her; but it was the joy of a child with a new toy. They were all a part of her beautiful life, the same as the birds and the flowers, the lotus-ponds and the lace-like screens that shut her from the world outside. She did not know that women sold their souls for the baubles with which she played so carelessly.

VI

Natara spent happy years, passing from childhood to young womanhood by the side of her father. Nothing that affected her

or that he thought could give her pleasure was too slight for his Royal notice. He would leave his Hall of Audience to go to her, to play with her, to walk with her in the gardens or to tell her stories in the moonlight.

Her days were uneventful, but I tried to fill them with little duties that made them pass quickly. In the morning we rose, and after the ceremonial cleansing we did pooja before the household altar. Then, after the morning meal, we joined the women in the courtyards or in some chosen apartment, where we looked at silks or jewels or perfumes sent behind the screens by the merchants of the city. These were brought to us by clever women, who not only sold their silks and perfumes, but gave as added gifts a whole shopful of gossip. Through them we learned of the events occurring in the city, the marriages and births, the quarrels and intrigues of the women in other palaces. It was all brought to us and emptied into our laps, and the idling

women listened eagerly to the news of the world outside our walls.

But not alone through these clever gossip-mongers were we informed of the actions of our friends, as relatives or acquaintances were constantly visiting the women of the palace and giving them the scandals of the day. Although there was no Queen nor reigning favorite, the palace was filled with women who had come to live under the protection of the great King. There were relations to the utmost degree, aunts, cousins and cousins' cousins, many of them widows, who, on their bereavement, had returned to the home roof-tree, instead of remaining with the families of their late husbands. All of these noble women had hosts of servants and poor relations; consequently the purdah hummed like a hive of busy bees upon a sunny day.

In the afternoons Natara passed long hours idling in the perfumed waters of the bath, where the young girls of the Court had battles royal with roses as their wea-

pons, or where they lay on marble couches and allowed their slaves to make their fair skins still fairer with scented oils and powders.

At times they dressed in wondrous costumes and enacted the old-time plays, or listened to the musicians or watched the dancers that were kept for the amusement of the women. In the evenings from behind the marble screens they listened to the singers or watched the jugglers, or heard the long discourses of the pundits who came from far and near to entertain the Rajah.

The Rajah, as the Princess grew older, believed that Saraswati, the Goddess of Knowledge, should be enthroned within our rooms. Gurus were brought from the sacred college and from them Natara learned Sanscrit, the language used by many who came to the palace and which she must master if she would profit by their discourses. French and English were added to her studies, in order, as the Rajah said, that she might understand the Western

mind through what they had given the world in literature. The great King and the Princess read together or listened to the court reader, who was chosen for his musical voice, and she learned that books can charm into pure gold the leaden hours.

The Rajah believed it the privilege of the great to foster piety and learning; consequently he kept a staff of pundits whose lives were made free from anxiety so that they might heap up knowledge and pore over ancient texts. Many students dwelt in the palace, and any one, whatever his belief, who was famous for his learning, was invited to rest within the walls.

Many a bare-footed preacher, wearing the yellow robe of Buddha and appealing for alms in his sacred name, was given lodgings for a few days because of some chance remark that he let fall before listening ears, with the hope that he might have some new truth or the old truth in a new garment, to which the King would be pleased to listen.

Wandering monks from all castes and all

creeds were lodged within the guest rooms. The King would ask these holy men, "What have you seen elsewhere?" and he listened attentively to the tales of their journeys as they wandered from State to State. He ended by saying, "What have you noted here?" and often some innovation or search was started that came from the suggestion of a world-weary old man, that unkind tongues would call a traveling beggar.

Teachers came from the far north, from the college by the Sacred River to teach Natara the eternal truths of the Vedas, the folk-lore of the Puranas, and the legends contained within the Upanishads. She learned the doctrine of Maya, the illusion of all things. A blind Moslem came to chant the Koran in order that she could understand the meaning of the call of the Muezzin, "There is no God but God, and Mohammed is His Prophet."

Against my wishes knowledge of the religion of the Western world was brought to her. With it I had no quarrel except

that I could not feel that God had favored the Western race by sending them the *only* Prophet. He may have been a great Prophet, but I cannot admit that he stands alone in the history of the world as the only messenger of God. We have seen two, Rama and Krishna. They have come back to lay hold on the hearts of men, for the protection of the good, for the destruction of the evil, and they will return again and again as the world has need of them.

But I respect the Western religion. A person has a right to hold his own belief if he does not try to force it upon another. I may admire the medicine that cures another of his ills, but I should not be forced to drink of it because it has been of benefit to him.

There are as many Gods as worshipers. Each of us has his own God, but it is the one God in the many forms we have created, one Spirit manifesting itself in many forms. Names of God are but names, after all. Why should not God have an infinity

of titles? It does not make him less the one God. I may call my God Shiva and single out certain aspects of importance to me. You may call him Vishnu and emphasize other aspects, but it is really the same God that we worship, who possesses all the virtues that we adore.

Religion is a simple thing, after all. It is the wise men, the priests, who hurt religion, which is only an instinct of the heart to worship something stronger than itself. These wise men try to read something into it which, instead of simplifying it, makes it more elaborate and difficult to understand.

Let the world have its temples, its mosques, its churches. When one leaves their doors, one takes something from the holy place one has not brought to it. Something is found there, comfort, hope, or at least a sense of duty done or a God pleased. The true religion lies in service, not in floating incense nor in wreathing the God with flowers nor the sprinkling of Ganges

water on a Sacred Bull. A glass of cold water is just as sweet whether given in the name of Vishnu or the Christ upon the Cross, if given with the hand of love.

But I have wandered far from the women's courtyard and the life of my young Princess. I will return to it.

All of her hours were not given to study nor to the poring over of old manuscripts. The thing she loved best, and which would cause all of the women to come hurrying from their apartments, was the wandering poet-singer who was asked to chant his songs.

In the courtyard of the King's apartments, the marble floors would be covered with rare rugs; soft cushions and low divans would be placed near tables loaded with fruits and wines; perfumed smoke would rise from hidden braziers, and quiet servants would pass among the guests to light a pipe or fill a glass.

The women in the shadows behind the

purdah would kneel in the silence and hear words falling like water, drop by drop, as the singer chanted the Mahabharata, where mighty warriors, beautiful women and great saints moved to and fro across the scene in glittering confusion.

These tales were never tiresome. We loved the heroes and the gods, and from the first ringing words of the *Gita*, "Yield not to unmanliness, O Son of Pritha. Ill doth it become thee. Shake off this weakness and arise, O Terror of Foes," until Krishna bursts forth on the sight of the worshipers as the Universal Form, in whom all that exists is One—we sat entranced.

We heard often the story of Rama and Sita, or they chanted the beautiful poems of Kalidasa, those mystical songs whose rhythm moves the world.

Each day had its record of pleasure, of pain and of work done.

So passed the girlhood of my Natara.

VII

One day when Natara was nearing womanhood, her father came to our apartment, and, after watching Natara for a time, he turned to me and said:

“Amina, she is now nearly a woman grown.”

He called Natara to him and, turning back her head with his hand, he looked long into her eyes.

“Little one, thou art more and more like thy mother. Thine eyes—they draw the heart from out my body.”

He was silent for a time, then rising he took her by the hand and said:

“Come with me, Natara; I have a gift for thee.”

Motioning for me to follow, he led us through the Audience Hall, then through his own apartment to a garden. In the wall of the garden was a small door of sandal-wood inlaid with ivory. My heart stood

still as I saw the Rajah place a key within the lock. I knew that that door had been closed, even to me who loved her, since the passing of the Queen.

As the door slowly swung open, he stepped back for us to enter. Natara stopped within the gateway and gave a cry of delight, then held out her hands to the vision of beauty before her. Even I, who knew that dream garden, could not repress a cry as I saw it again in all its magic loveliness.

"Father, Father, what is it?" Natara half whispered, as if the beauty before her was an unsubstantial dream that might be shattered if she spoke too loudly.

The Rajah was silent, self-absorbed, and did not answer. His face was white, for a moment his lips quivered, then he brushed his hands across his eyes, as if to brush away some vision unseen by us.

"It was our Palace of Love, our beautiful Garden of Dreams."

VIII

How can I describe that garden made by a great King who had all the riches of the world at his command, for the woman he loved!

Leading from the gate was a long, straight piece of water held within low marble walls, in the center of which rose fountains at equal distance, sending their spray high into the air. Along each side of the water was a walk of white marble on which was sculptured flowers, bordered with ebony and silver. On the outside of the walk were beds of brilliant flowers, gorgeous blossoms that glowed in the sunshine. Behind was a row of trees in bloom and over the mass of scarlet and gold, green-turbaned heads of palms could be seen standing like sentinels to guard this beauty.

The avenue ended at a marble palace, placed on the borders of a lake whose waters glistened and glimmered in the

dying sunlight. It was like a dainty jewel-box with its fluted columns, its fairy-like balconies, its gleaming terraces and its delicately carved walls of purest white marble. The garden which surrounded it on the three sides was aglow with color, roses and climbing jasmine and red hibiscus among the dark trees. Near the farther wall we saw the dance of the sunbeams upon the white flower of the almond-trees.

We walked slowly down the pathway and at the entrance of the palace were met by the two old servants whom my mistress had brought from her father's home. They knelt and touched our feet with their foreheads, tears streaming down their faces in their joy that the palace of their beloved mistress would echo again to voices other than those of servitors.

The King spoke not a word. We wandered from room to room. It was like a knife-thrust in my heart to see again the place where we had spent so many hours of happiness.

Each room seemed more perfect than the other, if that were possible. They were all doorless and opened one into the other or led to terraces or balconies through carved arched openings.

There was a central courtyard where slender silver rods supported the rose-silk awnings which shaded the flower-filled court. A fountain in the center sent its spray of perfumed water into the air. The panels and the walls opening on this court were transparent, and the marble was so delicately chiseled that they resembled fragile pieces of lace.

Each room was different. In one the walls were of roses, each flower and leaf so perfectly carved, it seemed as if one could pluck them from their setting. In another, rose-colored lotus flowers wandered over the moss-green walls, as if recently brought from the lotus ponds outside. In other rooms the panels were filled with flowers, the leaves and blossoms of which were formed of gold and lapis lazuli and agate

and porphyry, and there were glints of emeralds and rubies, and diamonds were set as dewdrops upon the opening buds. But it was so fine, so rare, so deftly wrought, that the purity of the snow-white rooms was in no wise marred.

Before the bedroom was a screen of chiseled ivory. The Rajah hesitated a moment, then throwing back his head as if he would meet his sorrow bravely, we entered. The room resembled a casket made of lace, and there came from it a perfume like some breath of tenderness, to welcome us. The entire nest was of transparent chiseled marble behind which hung curtains of rose-colored silk, through which gleamed softly shaded lights. It seemed as if there were a presence in the room, as if all of the love of the world had been centered here.

We passed to the dressing-room where the tables were filled with the articles of the toilet, articles of gold inset with precious jewels. The Rajah touched them with caressing fingers, and murmured to

himself, "I gave them to her, these things that touched her body. It is the little things we give the loved one, great gifts are for every one."

From the dressing-room we entered the bath, where the water flowed over black marble traced with silver, giving the appearance of ripples in the sunlight.

We passed to the terrace that led to the lakeside. At the bottom of a flight of steps a boat, shaped like a great basket of flowers, was anchored. At the back of the boat was a raised dais on which was a divan piled with cushions of silk and gold embroideries, and over the dais was stretched an awning of red and gold, supported by slender golden rods.

From the terrace a flight of steps led to the roof of the palace. There had been placed rugs and divans, small tables with fruits and sweetened drinks, and at each corner incense arose from silver braziers.

We went to the balustrade facing the garden and looked at the beauty spread before

us, at the rose gardens, the lotus pond, the tiny pavilion at the water's edge, at everything that love and fabulous wealth could lavish upon the setting of a loved one.

"Father," said Natara, "why have you never brought me here before?"

He sighed.

"I have never been here myself in all these years. When the roses have gone and the garden has withered, who wishes to return? I felt I could never see it again. A wealth of dreams and hopes and love are all contained within this casket. The very stones speak to me of the past, and the dust is fragrant with its memories."

After a few moments of silence, he said:

"Natara, I give this, my jewel palace, to you, as a hiding place from the wind, a covering from the tempest. You may need it in times to come. It is thine, and perhaps it will live again in thee."

Leaning his arms upon the balustrade, he looked over the garden.

"Love and happiness and joy and laugh-

ter were always standing at the gate of this enchanted garden. I was stifled in ceremony and lost in a sea of obligations in that great palace there, but here I left all worldly care behind. When I unlocked the door, with silent steps she came to me. I placed my heart within the dimple of her chin. I kissed her neck where clinking jewels tried to hide its beauty. I forgot the world, we were alone, we two—

“O Natara, all memories, all desires fade away like the flowers from the mogra-tree, but the memory of love remains. My bird of a thousand songs is silent, but her song still sings in my living heart and I listen for its music through the stillness of the night. It sounds—it is there, always, forever, an undercurrent I can always hear, like the muffled voice of the wind among the listening palm-trees.”

For a time he did not speak, then he continued in a low voice:

“Still she comes to me. I can hear the chime of her jeweled anklets, feel the soft



JAGMANDAR ISLE is one of the
jewels of Pichola Lake in Udaipur.

touch of her rose-leaf hands, and see her loving face which haunts my dreams like rain at night."

He was silent. Then, forming a seat of cushions for Natara upon the rug, he threw himself upon the divan, one arm laid lightly across her shoulder as she sat below him.

"Natara," he said, "I have never spoken to thee of thy mother. I could not speak of her, but now—I will open my heart to thee. I will tell thee of that love which is the seed of all happiness."

Natara caressed his hand softly. It seemed to me that an overwhelming sense of tenderness and union took place between them as they sat there bathed in the mystic radiance of the dying light.

He spoke softly, a far-away look in his brooding eyes.

"I found that perfect face, that perfect love, the fulfilment of the dreams that come to men when they are young. I can see her standing here swaying like a lotus in a soft current. Her voice was as sweet

as the song of the bulbul singing upon the mango-tree; her smile was the flower in the fields; her laugh, the rustle of the wind in the palm-trees. When she raised her face it was like a blossoming flower, her lips the opening bud of the first rose. I took the gold from the hills, the pearls from the sea, to cover her, yet she was not to me, because of them, more precious. We do not love a woman because of beauty nor grace, nor because of tinkling anklets. We love her because she sings a song we alone can understand. Our hearts had sung it countless times before, and we had responded as the lute string responds to the hand of the player. When we hear the call we follow it from land to land, from heart to heart and on and on throughout the eternal ages. We had been lovers throughout the past, we will be lovers for all the future. It is written."

Then he spoke more softly, as if speaking to some one we could not see.

"My Natara! As soon as I opened my eyes to thee, I closed them to all the world

outside. I swept out the chambers of my heart and made it ready to be the dwelling-place of thee, my beloved."

He was silent, then he said in a tone I had never heard before:

"She was the sun of all my thoughts. When she came into a room she lit up the darkness with her sunshine. Fortune put a goblet of joy into my hands and I drank deep quaffs, and then, as if jealous of my happiness, it was snatched away. It taught me that love is but a messenger sent before the feet of sorrow."

He bent his head and we left him to his memories.

After a time he spoke again:

"Then—then—night came to me shrouded and silent. I lived within the darkened chamber of my soul. I said at first, 'The gods have broken me with their anger and multiplied my sorrows without use.' I said again in my bitterness, 'There will be no music in the world for me. I will grow gray behind some curtained window.'

"I passed my days and nights in dreams,

dreams that took me back to the jeweled kingdom of the past. But at last I knew that even though the flower fades and dies, he who has possessed the flower must not mourn for it forever. In my infinite loneliness I learned my lesson. I learned that life is made for service, not for brooding in the silence over memories of the past. I learned that there are two voices ever calling us, one to count the sea's buried dead, the other to find its treasured pearls. I felt that there were no pearls for me, but I would look for them, and—I found my people.

"I know now that I am but an arrow sent into space to guide them for a time. I tried to leave behind me the shadowed valley and climb the mountains on which the sun might still be shining. But—" he repeated softly:

"The way to Thee lies over grief and pain,
The soul gropes on, the darkness doth remain."

He threw himself back upon the divan, his arms crossed beneath his head, seemingly intent upon the sunset, which, like a miser, was hiding its gold. He said so softly we could scarcely hear him:

“How fearful a thing is the longing for a person! How long the creeping days to one who waits! Oh, when I speak of her I feel once more the clasp of her arms, the kiss of her lips, her eyes of tenderness, the depth of her love.”

He rose abruptly from the couch and, stretching out his arms, said:

“I am like a bird who has lost his wings and can no longer mount the skies.”

He walked up and down the carpet, then he went to Natara and, raising her, he said:

“But it is of your life I would speak, of you I must think.”

He brought her to the divan and drew her down beside him, his arm around her waist.

“My dreams for you are that you see life through a haze of happy days. I would set

the wine of your life in a golden goblet. I would carry your lamp through the stormy night. I have given the love that I had for my dear one to thee, and I would that I could pluck the world like a fruit from the sky to place in your rosy palm. I have promised that he who comes searching for thee as wife, shall have only one gift with which he can buy your heart—love. I want you to know this love of which I have spoken to you. Thy lover's voice is the music that will cause the world to sing for you, and when you wear the wedding bracelet it will be for you the symbol of the love that lives through all eternity.

“Being loved—that is a glorious thing. But it is not the most glorious. Loving—that is it—pouring out your soul in love and devotion to the one you love. Ah, Natara, the Prince of your Dreams will come to you and fill your life with the desires of your heart. Take nothing less.”

After a time he rose and with his arm around Natara they walked to the balus-

trade overlooking the valley. They watched the scene for a time, then we left the terraced roof and passed through the rooms below, where the soft white witchery of moonlight filtered through the lace-like panels, throwing fairy-like shadows upon the marble floors.

Over it all was a subtle sadness, a regret weighted with faint perfume, as of an old blue china bowl in which had been gathered rose leaves, long since faded.

IX

When Natara was a woman grown, her father died. The whole country mourned him, as every one, from the great feudal lord to the lowliest pariah, felt that he had lost a friend. It could have been fitly written upon his tomb, "He sleeps in Peace, for he has made tranquil the hearts of men."

As for Natara and myself, the sun was darkened in our sky. In the palace of the new Rajah, a different song was chanted.

There was a vast ocean between the life that was now lived within the palace walls and what it had been before Achmed came to the throne. It was impossible to find peace within that humming city which was rapidly filling with women whose fears and hopes depended upon the momentary whim of the King.

A great change had come as soon as the influence of the old Rajah was removed. New faces were constantly added to the harem, new favorites would arise and sway the women's world for a time, to be soon supplanted by another favorite. Women were brought from the North, the South, the East and the West. They brought their women and their slaves, their gods and their superstitions. I have heard it said that there are thirty-three million gods in India. I quite believe the tale, and I am sure they all found a resting-place beneath the palace roof.

Each woman had her signs and her omens by which she was guided in sickness and

health. Each woman had her philtres and her formulas for compounding medicines or brewing magic potions that would charm a recreant lover or make ill a hated rival.

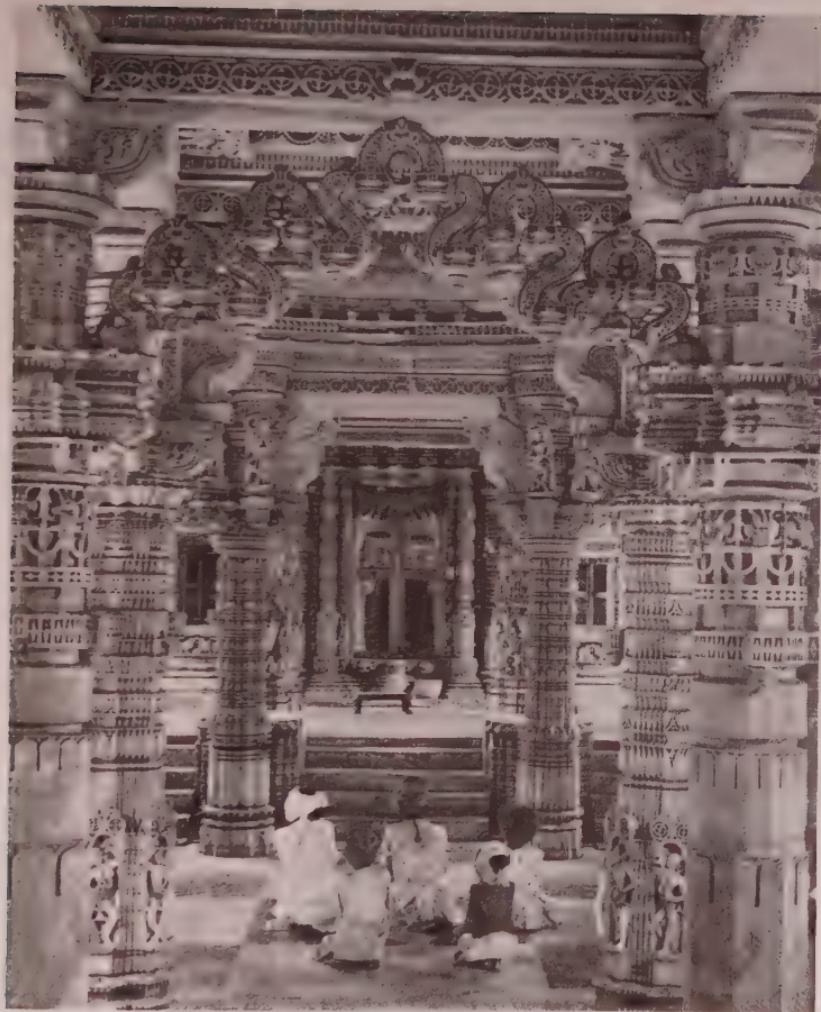
If the Rajah had drunk all of the love potions that ambitious women brewed for him, he would soon have been called to rest in the bosom of Brahma. If he had worn all of the amulets and charms that fair hands made for him, he would not have found a place on his Royal Person on which to put the state jewels. If the gods had answered all the prayers that were sent to them by anxious hearts, they would have had no time to listen to the cries of the rest of India.

These women who used religion as a means of furthering their little hopes and ambitions, who tried to enter into a partnership with their gods, offering them incense and garlands in exchange for aid in their jealous intrigues and palace plots, were constantly bowing before their altars, wreathing their gods with marigolds or

burning odorous woods or incense. The women's quarters reeked with the heavy smell of fading flowers and musk. The old keeper of the harem was in desperation. Yet she encouraged the women in their worship. As she said to me, "When they are weaving garlands to deck their gods they are not brewing poisons to feed their rivals."

I found that under the new order a palace full of idle, jealous women can stir up more trouble than a province in rebellion. And I also learned another thing, which I was obliged to impress upon Natara, who, with a young girl's impulsiveness, was often in trouble: "Wisdom is made up of ten parts, nine of which are silence and the tenth is brevity." I had the Court writer make a scroll which I hung beside her bed: "Words, like the tusks of an elephant, once out, cannot be put into the mouth again."

I was tired of the palace. I was tired of the jangling, wrangling, jealous women. I saw more clearly day by day that it was no



*ALWAYS there are worshipers before
the shrine in the marvelous Mem-
nath Temple at Mt. Abu, Dilwarra.*

place for a young girl. I did not care to have her days passed with these idle, pleasure-loving dolls, whose dainty henna-tinted hands had never fulfilled a useful service, whose lives were dominated solely by the emotions of jealousy, passion, greed and what they called love. It was the one word heard continuously—love—love—love. The courts resounded with it, yet I knew it was not love of which they spoke, but that which takes the place of love within all palace walls.

I decided to take Natara to the White Palace. When I told His Highness, much to my astonishment, he refused to give the permission. I could not understand him. But he would not explain why he wished Natara to live in her present apartments. Of course, his word was law, and I could do nothing.

I pondered over the problem many nights, and at last came to the conclusion that he was intending to take the palace for some favorite, and if Natara was installed

within it with all her women, he could not easily dispossess her.

But the gods were on my side. There came a climax. The Rajah in his wild extravagance needed funds, and in his eagerness to refill his gold-box went too far, even for a Rajah.

The outer apartments of the palace were filled with women, relatives of the Royal House, many of them widows, and all, because of their blood claims, drew an allowance from the Imperial treasury.

The Rajah decided that he would take their allowance, and, what was worse in their eyes, their jewels. He argued that widows must clothe themselves only in white, eat but one meal a day, attend no festivities, consequently need no jewels, so why should so many precious rupees that were now needed so urgently by his Royal self, be expended for their support, and tied up in useless jewelry. These women were only a burden to the state, which he interpreted as meaning Achmed the Rajah.

The women might not have rebelled at the loss of their allowance in money, knowing that they were certain of support, but any woman will fight for her jewels, whether she wear them or not.

They were in a seething state of rebellion. All they needed was a leader. They found one.

A favorite cousin of the late Rajah was a woman from the hills who was not only beautiful but clever, and the Rajah had given her many jewels and presents, including an estate near her father's home. She felt that the confiscation of the jewels and the personal fortunes of the women was aimed at her, as the new Rajah had long cast his greedy eye upon her possessions. She was frightened and spent long nights in planning a way of escape to her estate, where she knew she could call upon her father for protection. But she was not allowed to leave the palace, as a watch was kept upon all her movements. At last she conceived a plan, and for a purdah woman

it was a desperate plan, and could only have been conceived in desperation.

The Rajah's tomb had been erected at the end of the vast palace gardens, outside the wall. The city temple was near it and across the street was the great Mohammedan mosque. It faced the main thoroughfare of the city, connecting the business section with the two big places of worship.

At mid-day, when all of the men of the city were going to their worship, or kneeling in silent prayer, two hundred women from the Imperial palace rushed from a breach they had made in the palace wall, and threw themselves around the tomb of the Rajah.

There was consternation in both temple and mosque. No man might look upon the face of a woman of the palace. Men intent upon worship gave one frightened, hurried glance at the wailing women and fled, many so hurried in their flight that they left their shoes and prayer-mats.

The whole city buzzed with the news. It

was an unheard-of thing. Every one was shocked to the depths of his being by this amazing act on the part of the palace women. The Rajah sent his Court Chamberlain, his Minister of State, and even the general of his troops to command the women to return to their apartments. They refused, unless he would promise not to take their jewels. The Rajah's pride was aroused. He would not make the promise —the women remained. All day and all night and all of the second day they stayed beside the tomb, and not a man in the city dared visit mosque or temple. It practically stopped the business of the city, as the main street could not be used, and no one dared to come to the bazaars to trade. The merchants closed their shops, waiting for the storm to pass.

The Rajah was desperate. At last he sent for me and I found him pacing up and down his apartment like a tiger chained. He threatened to turn his Northern Pathans upon the women and force them to re-

turn to the palace; but I told him that would only make more trouble. Those barbarians from the North would like only too well to have our soft dark-eyed women in their power, but it would rouse sympathy in the people of the city and might lead to a general uprising.

Then I saw my opportunity. I, too, would bargain. I showed him that the whole country was laughing at him, that the bazaars rang with the story of the trouble in the harem of the Rajah who was too weak to control his women-folk, and I agreed that if he would give me his promise, before his Minister of State, that Natara and I with her court could go to the White Palace and make it permanently her home, I would get the women to come in. At first he refused—but finally he gave me the promise, and I had it tied by every way I knew, as I did not wholly trust his Royal word unwitnessed.

I sent a messenger to the women, and told

them that I would see that they had justice, and I also dropped a few hints regarding the Pathans waiting outside the city. The women had confidence in me, and perhaps they were hungry and martyrdom was no longer a novelty, so they came back to their courtyards. I sent the Rajah away on a three days' hunting trip, and after many tears and much talk, the matter was adjusted, not to every one's satisfaction, but I made them see that they could not take up a permanent abode upon the Rajah's tomb, and it were better to keep part of the fish than to give it all to the whale.

When it came to Sita, the woman who had planned and incited the others to their rash act, she could not be found. While the excitement was at its height, when all eyes were directed to the temple courtyard, she, with her women and many carts, had slipped by an outer gate, and by the time she was missed she was safely within her father's land. I laughed to myself, and in

my heart was secretly glad. The jewels would be as well with her as adorning the pretty body of a Lucknow dancing girl.

I sent cart-load after cart-load of wailing women to a palace in the country, and when the Rajah returned all was peace again.

X

I took my little one and her women to the White Palace. I locked the gate and kept the key. No one could enter without my permission.

My Princess should have the chance to grow in purity, to live amongst the flowers, the birds, a chance to keep her mind clean as a burnished mirror.

XI

Life within the enclosing walls of the quiet garden moved to a different rhythm than that of the Court. Instead of living in a world of hateful thoughts and violent emotions, we were in a world of beauty, of

charm, a charm as intangible and subtle as a perfume.

We were happy in our garden. We were in the heart of a wonderful silence, yet we knew that life was about us everywhere, although its tones were hushed to a shadowy monotone. We knew that each day would bring the same sweet peace, and from it would pour forth sunshine and song of birds and the golden wine of a new day.

We watched the outside world from the balustrade of the roof. From sunrise to sunset we saw the life of the people move on, and the hum of labor and the chink of tools rose up as if in some vast monastery accompanied by the chanting of prayers in the near-by temples. Religion is entwined with the every-day toil of the people of India, who are a spiritual people, and they invoke their gods before starting the work of a new day.

We watched the potter sensing his wheel, or the school-boy his ink and brush, as if

asking these humble creatures to give of their best. Women on their way to and from the river would stop before a bo-tree or a tulsi-plant to salute it, joining their hands and bowing their heads in prayer. In the early morning we saw housewives kneeling upon their doorsteps busied with the ceremony of the Salutation of the Threshold, drawing a pattern upon the pavement in lines of powdered rice, with flowers arranged at regular intervals within it. This delicate handiwork would remain for only a few hours, but it marked the fact that cleansing and worship had been performed.

In the heat of the day we passed the hours in the courtyard, which was a great well of coolness and shadow where the soft white witchery of the sun filtered through the latticed screens.

When the rain came we listened to its falling as it swept across the lake, like the patter of tiny feet upon a roadway. The birds with their draggled wings became



*CALCUTTA'S Botanical Gardens boast
a splendid avenue of Royal Palms.*

silent on the tamarind-trees and the only noise was the water running in rills through the narrow grooves with the sound of laughing women.

At night, when purple shadows filled the air, we went to the boat and lay there in the quiet, hearing the chatter of sleepy birds as they cuddled into their resting-places to wait for the dawn to lift the leaves from about their heads. We listened to the wind's song through the tree-tops as though some harp had caught a strayed breeze from an unknown world and brought its message to us. At last even the nests of the birds became silent and the murmur of the palm-trees was stilled and only the soft hush of the darkness was around us. Vast and deep the night seemed to enfold us, until the moon came slowly up the sky as if he were a watchman with his lantern passing by. At times the lone cry of a night bird came to us, or the sad call of a flute from some lover passing to

the village, who left the trace of his song across the hush of the night.

The scent of sandal and flowers was woven with the sleepy incense of the night, and we were lulled to a dreamy peace until the fairies of sleep would come sailing by in their elfin boats and tell us it was time to leave the splendor of the dark blue night, lighted by large soft stars that throb and gleam with an unearthly brilliance, and seek our rest.

Those days passed within the courtyard or upon the housetop, surrounded by women who loved her, were happy days for Natara. Laughter was as natural to her as the song to the bird, and her whole being sang like a stream amongst the pebbles.

She did not feel her isolation, nor that she was barred from the world outside. We women of the East are like tall white lilies, set in the dimness beside some altar, screened from the very glances of the faithful at their prayers. The purdah, in

whose shadow we sit, is not a prison, but a shrine. Bereft of its concealment, we would be frightened, feel dishonored.

Natara did not crave the life of the world outside our walls, but she wanted love. The song of the birds, the perfume of the flowers, the murmur of the quiet waters and the peace of moonlit nights, only brought to the surface what was slumbering underneath, the cry for human love—a woman's birthright. She began to talk shyly, as young girls will, of the Prince who would one day come for her, and I could see that she was dreaming dreams and having visions of her own.

When we first came to the palace I had installed upon the throne in our little temple, Saraswati, the Goddess of Knowledge. Each day I saw Natara go to the gardens and gather the sweetest smelling flowers and the white mango-blossoms before going to the temple. I followed her there one day and found that Saraswati was de-throned and in her place was Madan, the

God of Love. She was strewing the floor with fresh mango-petals, and on Madan's neck and tiny wrists were wreaths of jas-mine. Natara did not see me as I stood quietly in the shadow of the archway, and after her offering of the fragrant flowers, she knelt before the god, and murmured softly:

“If I were only a flower, to be made into a garland for thy neck, but I have woven my heart with the flowers, and you will send me my lover, the Prince of my Dreams.”

XII

We, in the peace and quiet of our enclosing walls, heard little gossip of the palace, as I did not encourage visitors from its women's quarters. Yet, news did creep in, and I knew that the Rajah's Court was spoken of as the most extravagant, the most luxurious, the most corrupt, in all India. His Highness seemed possessed with the wild desire to spend in reckless prodigality,

to scatter rupees broadcast, to give jewels to favorites, to entertain more royally than any prince since the time of the Great Moguls. He gave durbar after durbar. He invited the neighboring rulers to visit him, and they came with their nobles and trains of attendants until our streets were filled with strange faces and noise and clamor resounded from every side.

Dancing girls were brought from the South, from Calcutta and from Bombay, at fabulous prices, and we, even in our garden, were never free from the distant sounds of music and revelry. Hunting parties were organized, and the men, with their army of servants, their elephants, their trained leopards and their dogs, would go away for days.

The women of the Court shared in the excitement, and from behind the screens watched the dancing girls, or viewed from their balconies the battles between animals in the great arena without the walls. The women reveled in the changing scenes, al-

though their interest was mingled with jealousy as they saw their Lord throw a necklace over the rounded throat of some beauty who had pleased him with her dancing. They had no need for worry, as the infatuation could only be for a time. These dancing girls were for the most part owned by temples, and no amount of money would tempt the greedy priests to part with their most lucrative possessions.

Although the head of the harem forbade it, the dancers were brought secretly into the women's apartments, where their jewels were appraised, their saris valued, their dancing practised before an appreciative audience, who treated these pretty little false-faced women as amusing toys.

These clever entertainers who, like the broken cowrie, had been to many markets, and gained a knowledge of the world in which they plied their trade, did not hesitate to use all of their arts to charm the sheltered women of the palace. They told them stories which it were better they did

not hear and shrieks of laughter would resound throughout the corridors. But when the servant, who had been stationed to watch for old Helima, silently held up her hand, there was a scurrying of dancers' feet, and when the Mistress of the Harem entered with frown to ask the cause of merriment, all would be peace and she was greeted with quiet voices and child-like eyes, as they chatted of the price of silks in Madras.

XIII

The city was thrown into great excitement when it was known that Naranabad, the most powerful Maharajah in India, was to visit our Court. Our Rajah was delighted at the honor, and decided to excel himself in prodigality of entertainment. He would show the world that there was one Prince in India who understood the manner in which a Royal guest should be entertained.

Word was sent to all the provinces com-

manding the zemindars to present themselves at the capital, bringing with them elephants, camels, horses and men-at-arms. They were ordered to array themselves in their finest apparel, to bring their jewels from their treasure-chests. They must add to the magnificence of the Court. Nothing was to be spared to make of this great durbar an occasion to be spoken of in after years with bated breath.

Hundreds of tents were erected outside the palace grounds. They were hung with silks and rare embroideries, with rugs and tiger-skins upon the floors. A palace within the gardens was given the visitor and his suite, and within it no luxury known to our world was forgotten.

From our roof we watched the arrival of the nobles. They came by the tens with their attendants, and were assigned to their tents, in front of which were placed lances with pennants flying from their points. From each tent-top a great banner with



*THE Tower of Victory remains
to remind the world of the
past glories of Chitor.*

coat-of-arms proclaimed to the world the name and rank of the noble sheltered therein.

It made a scene of color never to be forgotten. The brilliant sunshine, the gaily striped tents with their pennants swaying in the breeze, the passing elephants with their broidered housings, their howdahs of gold and silver lacquer flashing in the sunlight, camels, the horses with their daring riders, all made a scene of splendor that was dazzling to the eyes.

At last the great Prince came. He was conducted to the palace, and then the world seemed turned to madness. Entertainment followed entertainment. The place was filled with music, the harp-strings jingled and the drums beat night and day.

The mad revel was to culminate in a durbar held in the great courtyard of the palace, the evening before our guest was to say farewell. Natara and I were commanded to join the court women, where

from behind lace-like marble walls we could see all that was passing in the court below, ourselves unseen.

At last the night arrived. We women took our places on the hidden balcony that ran around the four sides of the courtyard. Natara and I were seated directly opposite the two thrones from which the Rajahs were to view the pageant.

The trumpets sounded. Our Rajah, arrayed in all his jewels, a great diamond gleaming in the aigret of his turban like a wicked eye, came into the courtyard with his nobles dressed in their official robes. He seated himself, and they formed three great semicircles around their King. The English Resident and his attachés came, saluted, and were given places near the throne. As one of the staff of the Resident bowed before the Rajah, I heard a low sigh from Natara. I turned to her; she was looking with eyes of interest at a young man who stood before the King. He was tall and fair, with deep-blue eyes, and he

stood at his ease as if it were a thing of every-day occurrence to stand before a Maharajah as his guest.

When all were within their places assigned to them, there was a vast volume of sound as the trumpets announced the entrance of Naranabad with his men. Our King rose and stepping down the five steps leading to the throne, conducted Naranabad to the seat beside him. As they stood side by side before the thrones, they were a striking pair. Our Rajah was a few years younger, more graceful, standing in his shining robes and glittering jewels. But Naranabad, although his evil face bore marks of dissipation, bore himself with kingly pride.

As I looked down upon them, so proud in all their glory, I thought:

“You have all the rank and power and riches of the world within your hands; but in the end you will mount the pyre the same as your pipe-bearers, and your bodies will not make a greater ash.”

When all was quiet the durbar commenced.

Flaming torches were placed at equal distances round the courtyard. The great doors were thrown open and to the sound of marching music, elephants, two by two, came in and dividing at the entrance went to places near the walls, where they stood around its three sides facing the throne. They were covered with velvet hangings that swept the ground. Their howdahs shone like gold, and from their ears swung hoops of gold and silver, inset with sparkling glass or semi-precious jewels, which sparkled as they waved their fan-like ears. Their faces and trunks were painted gorgeous colors, and their anklets jingled as they moved their great unwieldy feet.

The trumpets sounded. Another band of elephants came in and separating at the entrance went to their places a little in front and between their standing brothers, but they, at word of command, knelt down. The camels came, their ugliness hidden by

rich draperies, and they formed a standing row before the elephants, then others came and knelt as did the elephants.

Again the trumpets sounded. A band of horsemen, arrayed in warrior dress of olden days, dashed into the arena and swinging to left and right took their places before the kneeling camels. Soldiers clothed in glittering armor took their stand before the horsemen, their shields on arm, their lances held on guard before them.

Within this living square the games took place. Men tilted from their horses' backs; they fought with swords, with lances, played all the games of war known to our world in days gone by. The victors came and bowed low before the Rajah and received reward.

When tiring of the fiercer combats, the Rajah waved his hand and jugglers entered. Clever men did mysterious things that made us hold our breath with awe. But when they had exhausted their skill,

rugs were placed upon the ground and musicians entered and seated themselves at left and right. Servants placed wreaths of fragrant flowers upon the necks of the guests, and fruit and wine were offered. That was the signal that the gentler part of the entertainment was to begin.

The musicians chanted songs of battle and songs of love until all were thrilled with a wanton madness that caused the eyes to glisten and the faces flush.

At last the dancers entered. Women with bodies lithe as serpents swayed back and forth upon the carpet. With noiseless steps, except for the tinkle of their anklets, they told with subtle gesture the story of their loves, their hates and passions as it is known in the dancers' world.

We watched them languidly, as all were waiting for the entrance of the great dancer who had come from the South. She was the most famous dancer in all India, and her name was known from Madras to Peshwar.

At last the other dancers finished and arranged themselves before the musicians. The music stilled to a murmur, then it burst forth in one loud cry of joy. Standing in the great open doorway, with the black night behind her, stood a thing of gold and glitter that caused all eyes to stare, and a murmured long-drawn word that sounded like a sigh came from every throat. From the jewels in her head-dress, the gems in her ears, the necklaces on her beautiful throat, the naked arms circled from wrist to shoulder with glittering bracelets, to the bangles on anklets and the rings on henna-stained toes, she was a thing of witchery, made to drive men mad.

She came forward and bowed low before the throne, then commenced her dance. Behind her, singers intoned the melody to the accompaniment of throbbing drums and flutes.

At first the dance was slow and graceful as the waving of trees in a light breeze. She approached, she retired, she begged

and then she flaunted. She returned again and again with head thrown back and with half-opened lips that showed her pearly teeth, she begged the men before her to follow, she lured them with arms and breasts and languorous eyes. She reproached, she laughed, and her laughter was like music. She mocked with sparkling eyes and tried to leave her conquest, but love was strong; she returned, conquered by her own passion, and stretching out her arms imploringly she offered all in one final whirl of madness when she seemed a glittering flame that whirled and whirled until she dropped, like some fallen star, upon the mat.

When all was over we seemed to waken as if from some rare dream. The Rajahs left the courtyard, which was a sign that all might take their leave.

I, with the other women, rose and for a moment looked down into the buzzing courtyard, where the guests were standing in small groups chatting with their friends. I watched them for a time, then turned to

find Natara. I spoke to her; she did not answer. She was staring into the court-yard, and I looked to see what had so enthralled her that she did not hear my voice. She was looking at the young Englishman who stood a little apart from the rest. He was a figure to be noticed, his fair face appearing fairer among the crowd of swarthy men.

Suddenly he looked upwards. Natara moved back with a little gasp, and drew her veil across her face. I looked at her in wonder, and with a little anger in my voice said:

“He cannot see you, Natara; why do you shrink?”

A flush rose to her face, but she said nothing, and we joined the other women for the feast within the Queen’s apartments.

XIV

We returned to our garden and soon forgot the days of excitement, but they were to be recalled with a heavy hand.

Naranabad had been gone about a month, when one day the Rajah sent word that he would honor us with a visit. This did not please me at all, but no place, not even the most secluded purdah, could be refused the King; consequently I prepared for his call with the best grace I could summon.

As soon as he entered he asked for Natara. When she came, he stood back and looked at her critically, appraisingly, as he would look at a slave girl brought for his inspection. Natara flushed; I was indignant, and went to the side of Natara. There was something in the air I did not like. I resented the Rajah's attitude.

Finally he said:

"Natara, I have great news for you. Naranabad has asked for you in marriage."

In his excitement he commenced to pace up and down the room and did not see the sudden pallor that came over my face or the flush that rose to the cheeks of Natara. A weakness overcame me and I sat down

hastily upon a cushion. The Rajah did not notice my breach of etiquette, and continued talking excitedly, which gave me time to overcome my faintness, and soon I rose again.

"It is wonderful—marvelous— It will unite the two most powerful states in India. Naranabad and Achmed—why, if we join hands in any affair, not even England herself would dare oppose us."

Natara did not answer. He stopped pacing up and down and looked at her curiously.

"What is it, Natara?" he asked. "Do you realize what this means to you? It is fate that works for you—the gods are on your side. I used to reproach your father each time a proposal came for you and he refused. And now think of what this means to us. It is a great future for you. It is a lucky thing for me that you were kept waiting, although you are eighteen now, an unheard-of age for a girl to be unmarried."

“Wait for Naranabad!” I could not refrain from saying bitterly. “Yes, that is a wonderful future—Naranabad.”

He turned swiftly.

“What is the matter with Naranabad?” he asked, glaring at me. “She will be the Maharanee of the most powerful Prince in India.”

“What is it to be a Maharanee,” I asked, “if your kingdom is divided amongst hundreds, if every pretty face that shows itself is allowed to sway, even for a time, your kingdom? I suppose Natara will share her honors with that dancing girl from the South. Gossip says that you gave her to Naranabad as a parting gift. You seem to be prodigal in your gifts, Your Highness—the most expensive dancing girl in the kingdom—and the Princess Royal.”

The Rajah flushed, started to say something, then thought better of the impulse and said simply:

“But she will be Queen. What does it count if for a day or a week or a month a

lesser light shines in the heavens? She will always remain the Sun."

"That is not what Natara wants," I replied. "A woman's heart cannot be satisfied with power alone. That does not satisfy the craving for love, and it is love that I will have for Natara."

The Rajah shrugged his shoulders.

"Love," he said. "She will have love. Naranabad will be devoted to her."

"Naranabad!" I said with scorn. "What does he know of love! You cannot produce honey from the thorn, nor do roses grow on willow-branches. The word means no more to him than it does to yonder peacock on the wall. He will deck her with jewels, yes. But she already has jewels more precious than any he can give her. She will live in a royal palace, but she has here a palace of dreams; he could never build one of greater beauty. She shall not go to him."

The Rajah was quiet for a moment, then came and stood before me, his face twitch-

ing as he tried to control his anger. Finally he said, and there was that in his voice that made final his words:

“You are planting trees in a barren soil, Amina, when you try to change me in this matter. It is more than even in my wildest dreams I had ever hoped for, that one of our house would be the Maharanee of Naranabad.”

“Yes, think of it,” I said with aloes in my voice. I was not frightened. I am of royal blood myself and I have passed all of my life within a palace and have no fear of kings. “Think of having to be satisfied with a man like Naranabad. His love—bah! A false gem that passes from hand to hand. You are selling her for a golden pot out of which *you* may drink. What value to her his worthless rubbish of rank and wealth! Why—the potter’s wife sleeps more happily than would a queen within *his* palace.”

Then I felt all of the passion that was within me rise at the thought, and I said,

"I would rather see her go to the funeral pyre than to Naranabad!"

The Rajah became white with fury. His eyes flashed and two red spots showed in the white of his cheeks. He said in a voice that quivered with anger:

"Understand me, Amina. This is settled. There will be no more discussion. Natara will become the Maharanee of Naranabad. I will see that this marriage is hastened. I hope you understand."

Turning, he strode from the room.

XV

I was lost in a Sea of Sorrow. Natara should not go to Naranabad, to the most corrupt Court, ruled by the most corrupt monarch in India. Her father had not trained her for this, to be in the women's quarters of a man like Naranabad, even as his Queen. All of the ideals, the purity, we had tried to instil within her heart, would be there only an added burden. If she

was compelled to accept the life that would be given her there, she would have nothing for which to live except power, jewels, dress, and to be satisfied with the empty flattery of obsequious slaves—knowing herself to be a greater slave.

I must find a way to save her. There must be a path leading to the Light.

XVI

I passed the night with sleepless eyes, wondering what path was open to me; what door I could unlock. There was no one to whom I could appeal, to whom I could go for advice. Every woman in India would think Natara most fortunate, would give their all to exchange places with her.

At last I had an inspiration. There was *one* woman on whom I could call, who would understand. I rose in haste and sent for her.

Mara Iyengar, the daughter of one of
[84]



THE altar of Buddha at Jaipur is richly decorated with intricate carvings.

the great land-holders in our state, had been betrothed in childhood to a small princeling of a neighboring province. When the time came for the marriage to take place, she disappeared. She had gone to England with her English governess, and her name was mentioned in whispers. The parents were blamed for giving her a foreign teacher, and allowing her to imbibe ideas that did not fit her for the life of an Indian lady. Her father bitterly reproached himself, and her name was never mentioned within her home. She had disgraced her clan, and she was considered an outcast, a pariah.

The disgrace had no effect upon the good spirits of Mara Iyengar. After finishing her education she returned to our city and became the head of a hospital for women. My Princess, the Queen, liked her, and when she learned that Mara was skilled in her profession, she persuaded the Rajah to appoint her as Court physician to the women of the palace.

She retained the place under the new Rajah, and came in and out of the palace freely. She was loved and respected by all, the Rajah especially liking the free, outspoken woman, who treated him as a boy, and often a bad boy. She stood in no awe of His Royal Highness. Perhaps that was the secret of her power, surfeited as he was with flattery and tired of fawning satellites.

It seemed endless hours before I saw Mara crossing the courtyard. But, as I looked into her smiling face, I felt that part of my troubles were to be placed on stronger shoulders than mine. She had evidently come from the palace and the Rajah had heard that she was in my apartments. She was no sooner seated than His Highness was announced.

I had no opportunity of speaking of the matter that was lying so heavily on my heart, and Mara gave no indication before the Rajah that I had sent for her. He came in and stood before her.

"Ah, the Rose still blooms, I see," he said with mock seriousness.

"Through your august favor I still continue to live," she replied with equal seriousness. "Through your blessing my present and future happiness is secure, O Most Mighty One," and she bowed nearly to the floor in seeming humility.

The Rajah laughed and threw himself down upon a divan. "Where have you been for so long?" he said. "Kings, women and climbing plants love those who are near them. You should stay near me, Mara."

"So?" she said. "From henceforth the shadow of your foot shall be my abode. By the way, I left some medicine for one of your numerous and divers progeny, and her mother threw it out of the window and called in a priest, who made some pellets of paper on which were prayers, and the baby swallowed them instead of my medicine. Now I am sorry to tell you that prayers on paper, no matter how beauti-

fully written, will not cure the effects of a not overripe melon."

The Rajah did not look as if the subject interested him overmuch, and said, "Now that is your affair and the mother's. What child was it?"

Mara was quiet for a moment, regarding the Rajah as he lay on the divan, looking very handsome in his lazy, graceful attitude.

"Your Highness," she said finally, "I have often wanted to ask you. How many children have you?"

The King looked at her reproachfully.

"What a question to ask me, Mara! How should I know?" he said languidly.

Mara looked at him in astonishment.

"Well, of all things! Whom should I ask if not you?" she inquired.

"Ask my Minister of Finance. He attends to all such small matters as keeping account of the children. He has to—he pays their bills."

"Is that the duty of a Minister of Finance?" Mara asked laughingly.

"No, not all," the Rajah replied. "It is his business to increase the funds—mine to increase the wants."

"You work night and day to fulfil the duties of your position, do you not, my lord?" she inquired sarcastically.

"I do my best, my little best," he replied mournfully, shaking his head. "But I am weak—and—"

"Thy modesty resembles the lightning in the heavens," she said. "Now flashing and now passing away."

They both laughed and the Rajah made himself more comfortable on the divan.

"Send for my pipe man, Amina," he said. "I will stay awhile. I haven't seen Mara for a long time, and I want a talk with her."

He motioned Mara to a pile of cushions near the divan, and she sat down facing the King, her elbow resting lightly upon the

divan. She was the only woman in all his state, with the exception perhaps of the reigning favorite, who would dare to seat herself in so unceremonious a manner. That was her charm to him. She was not a woman to the Rajah; just a clever, quick-witted companion, who did not fear him, nor did she wish to curry favor. She talked as frankly to him as if he were simply the boy companion with whom she had played in childhood's days.

The pipe was brought and when it was lighted to his satisfaction, he smoked for a time in silence. Then he said, as if he had been pondering the subject:

“Do you like the English, Mara?”

“Yes,” she replied. “I like them in some ways; in others I do not. They are cold, or at least appear to be cold. They suppress their feelings, restrain emotions, cultivate an appearance of chilliness that does not make for friendship. To me they lop from the tree of life the branches that add beauty and not utility. They are colorless,

but—they treat their women well, Your Highness. They have but one wife."

I looked up at this remark. The English have but one wife.

"I know that they bring but one wife to India with them," he said. "But do they really have but one wife? Do they love but one woman? Are they true to her, to one woman?"

Mara laughed. "Well, it has been known in the history of England that her sons have wandered from their own fire-sides, but they generally wander back again. They really have but one wife at a time."

The Rajah looked up at the ceiling.

"I always wondered why I so thoroughly hate the English. Now I know. They set such a bad example to the world."

He was silent for a moment, then he said:

"If the English left India to-morrow—"

Mara interrupted him.

"If they did," she said sharply, "the next

day you and your Northern Pathans would be in the saddle and in three months there would not be a rupee nor a virgin in India."

The King laughed.

"What unkind words from the lips of a friend. You do not realize, Mara, that I am getting old. Neither women nor rupees interest me any more. All that I desire is that in some holy place I may end my days."

Mara turned to me and said solemnly:

"With Kings, with horned beasts and with a river, a man may never enter into understanding."

The Rajah laughed, and was quiet for a time; then he said suddenly:

"I have great news for thee, my friend. Natara is betrothed."

Mara glanced at me quickly and, I am sure, noted the pain in my eyes.

"Betrothed?" she asked. "To whom?"

"Naranabad," he replied.

"Naranabad!" she said with a gasp.
"Not Naranabad!"

The Rajah looked at her from beneath his half-shut eyes.

"Yes, Naranabad. It is a great honor. I was sure you would be delighted."

Mara said nothing.

"Aren't you delighted?" he insisted.

Mara repeated in a low, shocked voice:
"Naranabad!"

"Why not Naranabad?" he persisted.

"You know why she should not be given to Naranabad," she replied.

"I do not see the force of your argument, if you are going to make one," the Rajah said. "Naranabad is great and rich and powerful—"

"Folly!" said Mara disdainfully. "He is too old, in the first place; his palace is full of women already."

"But she would be the Maharanee."

"What of that! An empty title. She would be shut up in his dreary old palace, where the windows are so high she could

only catch a glimpse of the sky. I have seen his women's quarters. And—why, she is a child,—he is older than Your Highness."

The King flushed.

"I am not ready for the pyre yet, Mara. I am still alive, wonderful though it may appear to you."

"But," said Mara, "you know as well as I that as dark leans to dark, youth leans to youth. And he is the most dissolute Prince in India; his court is a byword for—"

The Rajah interrupted her.

"He is not so bad. He gets credit for many things he never does. You know a Prince is always in the glare of the sun-light—even I—"

Mara laughed.

"You can't make the tail of a dog straight by oiling it," she said tartly. "Look at his evil face—it shows the life he has led."

"He is a very handsome man," said the Rajah. "Next to me—"

“Yes,” sarcastically. “You both of you took a portion of the most excellent part of the moon to form your faces. If proof is desired, look at the spots left in the moon.”

The Rajah laughed, and settled himself back on the cushions.

“Oh, Mara,—” he commenced, but she interrupted him with a little tone of anger in her voice.

“I can’t understand Your Highness. Why should you give Natara to this man? You do not need him in any way. You do not need his money, nor his power, nor anything that is his. Why sacrifice Natara?”

The Rajah flushed and an angry glint came to his eyes.

“Why call it sacrifice? She will be the Queen of the richest and most powerful Prince in India, and Naranabad and I together—we can go far.”

“Riches!” Mara replied with scorn. “If you burden the wings of a bird with gold,

it can no longer fly in the sky. What does she care for his riches or his power? What—"

The Rajah interrupted her.

"We will not discuss the subject, Mara. Keep your energy; it may be useful. Kicks only raise dust, not crops, from the earth."

He was quiet for a time, looking at her intently, as if studying her with some problem in his mind. Finally he said:

"Mara, I have use for thy restless energy. Come and manage my palace, the women's quarters. I am tired of their bickerings and their quarrels, and Helima is getting old. If you can keep peace in my household, half of my kingdom shall be yours."

He was silent, then he said, half to himself:

"Mohammed said, 'I love not them that sit.' I think he meant all womenkind. "Women—" and he threw his arms above his head as if in despair, "I am tired of women!"

Mara laughed.



MADURA'S Hindu Temple has
nine marvelous pagodas.

"On any question regarding women you certainly should be a supreme authority. I have never seen so many women's faces within four walls as there are in your palace."

The Rajah laughed.

"You must admit, Mara, that they are pretty faces. I have shown good taste, if a little faulty judgment."

"Yes," said Mara. "But are you trying to rival Krishna with his sixteen thousand wives? You are no god, you know, my lord."

He waved his hand lightly.

"You are talking nonsense! There are not so many when you come to count them."

"Have you counted them?" she asked.

"No—" he admitted with a laugh. "Why expend my energy uselessly? There are so many other things to do. Take over my women, Mara, and I will go on a pilgrimage, and when I come back I may find a little peace."

"You know I do not believe in pilgrimages, especially for Kings," Mara said, with displeasure in her voice. "You only enrich the temple and the priests. No real prayers ascend from your heart. Why do you think that if you leave off your silks and satins and your jewels for a month, it will wash away the sins of the rest of the year? The gods don't need your lakh of rupees that you scatter to the priests. Unless your heart is clean from lust and pride and avarice, they will be deaf to all your prayers. What is it the poet sings? It fits your case exactly.

"'If still, O sinful man, with ash
Thou dost besmear thy face,
Or bathest oft, that thus thy soul
May cast away thy load,
Thou knowest naught of God, nor of
Regeneration's face.
Your mantras, what are they? The Veds
Are burdened with their weight.'"

The Rajah rose upon the couch and, leaning on his elbow, looked down at the

flushed face. I was surprised that there was no anger in his eyes. He said:

"Mara, what eloquence! I will make you court reciter, but—if you don't want me to go on a pilgrimage, I won't go. If you don't want me to pray, I won't pray. It does not make any great difference to the gods, I presume."

"No," she answered tartly. "And if the doctor gives you medicine, it doesn't matter to the doctor whether you take it or not, but it does to you."

"Well—what *do* you approve of my doing? I will be as clay in thy hands—"

Mara started to speak, but the Rajah put up a hand.

"One thing at a time. Let us settle the matter of the palace. I think, if I remember rightly, I made you a present. A harem, complete, full to overflowing, furnished with all that is necessary for a modern up-to-date harem. There is many a man in India who would be grateful for that little present," and he chuckled

quietly. “Are you coming to keep peace in my household?”

Mara did not laugh, but said seriously: “Do you remember the old proverb, Your Highness? ‘Many straws united may bind an elephant.’ We do not want you bound.”

The Rajah regarded her reproachfully. “Are you comparing my women, my incomparable women, to straws? I am ashamed of you! If they knew it, where would your medicine go when the messenger brings it?”

Then he said with mock seriousness: “The prophet Mohammed, blessed be his name, said that one of the surest marks of gentleness is tenderness to the weak. Judging of his vast experience, he was speaking of the female sex—and I am only trying to live up to his precepts, by being tender to them all, at least as many of them as I can—”

Mara laughed.

“The prophet also said, ‘Verily, my com-

passion overcometh my wrath.' It is true in my case."

The Rajah looked at Mara for a second, then closed his eyes and lay quietly on the divan. Mara looked at me and then at the man lying before her, and she saw the uselessness of opposing him. She realized it would not benefit Natara to raise again the question of her marriage. She would only make him angry. She leaned over him, and touching his eyes said with low voice:

"Ah, he sleeps. The world is left in darkness."

As he did not answer, she flicked an imaginary speck from his brow.

"Thy face is pure, Your Highness—though it be not washed."

The Rajah sat up and laughed.

"You have learned well the precept, Mara. The gods love them that swallow down their anger."

Mara made a naughty face at him and muttered a foreign word, not of prayer, beneath her breath. The Rajah heard it,

and with a show of indignation and shocked dignity rose, although like myself, he could hardly keep a laugh from his lips, as the little oath did sound most ludicrous coming from Mara's pretty mouth.

"Should the virtuous remain near the wicked," said he with mock solemnity, "the effects of the deeds of the wicked will fall upon the virtuous. The sea was put in chains on account of its vicinity to the wicked Ravenu. I will take my departure before I am contaminated."

Mara laughed and threw him a rose.

The Rajah caught it and placed it in his turban. Mara swept him an elaborate curtsy, and he, with a gay laugh and a wave of his hand, strode down the corridor.

XVII

The moment the Rajah was gone, the expression on the face of Mara changed. She came to me and said in a low voice:

"Is it true, Amina, is it true?"

“Yes,” I replied, and my face must have mirrored the bitterness in my heart, “it is true.”

Mara sat down.

“To Naranabad, of all men. To *Naranabad*,” she repeated as if she could not believe her own words.

I turned to her and stretched out my hands.

“What can I do, Mara! What can I do!”

Mara said nothing, but looked steadily in front of her, seemingly rendered speechless by this unforeseen blow.

She said finally in a low tone:

“Naranabad! Why, his very touch would be a pollution!”

“Mara,” I cried, and she must have felt the cry of my soul. “Mara, I cannot have her go to Naranabad. I do not know which way to turn. In the stillness of my heart, in the quiet of the night, I have thought and planned and thought again, trying to find the way, but I cannot. I am

drowned in an ocean of unhappiness. If she goes to him, she will be like a caged wild bird who has no songs behind the bars."

I rose and walked up and down the room and said in a low voice from which I tried to keep the passion-ring, because in these rooms without doors one can never tell what step may pause outside the archway:

"Mara, you will never know what this means to me. I have been waiting, dreaming of the love that will come to Natara, the love that came to her mother and made of her bud of happiness a flower. Whether I have been in the temple or the balcony, in the palace or the garden, I have been dreaming of the time when Natara should find the love of which her father spoke, love and joy and contentment in the arms of her Prince.

"We promised her mother that love only should be her heritage, that she should not wed for power nor rank nor riches. And I have taught her that love exists, that it

will come to her, that it waits for her at the gates of her enchanted garden."

I was silent a moment, pacing up and down the room. I could not sit down, I could not still the movement of my hands that seemed to be beating helplessly against a prison wall.

"You do not know Natara, Mara. She has spent her days in dreams here in this beautiful palace. She has lived a life of beauty. Like the blessed Buddha, nothing but the beautiful has come to her. She has believed that her Prince would come, a Prince like those in the fairy tales, and I have encouraged her. I should not have allowed her to have visions. I should not have allowed her to have the dreams of all young girls. I should have remembered that she is a Princess," I said with bitterness.

"Mara, I have lived all my life within a royal palace, and I have looked about me with eyes of knowledge. I should have known that the love for which I have

dreamed for Natara is not to be found within its walls. Look at our palace here, the most beautiful, the most luxurious in all India. It is thought to be the fulfilment of woman's highest desire to be brought to its women's courtyards. They come, young lives, glad with the gladness of youth, and for a time their days are rosy and gold like a glow in the sky before sunrise, but they end in the gray and wan twilight of a hopeless day.

"Look at Sarrojini, the Maharanee. When she came to us she was youth and joy and love itself. She was like a dancing girl floating to the sound of the lute in her happiness. It only lasted for a short time, until a new face peered from behind the purdah. She poured out her love before the Rajah as water is poured in the sand at noonday, and with as little use.

"At last she understood, and only grief remained in her heart. Oh, men are cruel in their lust and pride," I cried passionately. "They do not know that it is only

in love that woman's heart hath life. They say, 'I will buy you with money, I will buy you with jewels, I will buy you with a kingdom,' and they do not understand that we would rather have the jewels that tremble on the meadow plant, if gathered by one we love, than all the gems in royal caskets."

I stopped my pacing up and down the room and stood before Mara.

"Mara, I cannot believe that Natara's dreams will not come true, that her visions of love and joy will glide into memory. Pain and longing and unhappiness will come in their stead, pain that she will pray the gods to still, but 'twill only sleep and will wake again and again and become the pain of old. She will sing, yes. Because she is of a brave race, but the song will rise from the lips, not from the heart.

"Mara—Mara—is there no help? I have gone to the gods—there are no gods; they are nothing but lifeless images. They do not hear my sorrow, because I have

cried aloud to them and they do not answer. Mara, is there no way?" and I held out my hands to her in supplication.

Mara sat in brooding silence, then she spoke, and I did not need the sound of her voice to tell me that she saw no light.

"No, Amina," she said in a low voice. "I see no help. As well try to reform the curlings of a smoke-wreath as to change a man like the Rajah when he has once made up his mind. Natara cannot, as I did, fly to foreign lands. Natara is a Royal Princess, and she would be returned. No official, either Indian or English, would care to risk a native ruler's anger for the sake of a woman. England herself could not help Natara. She could not find a place in which to hide. I see no way."

I sat down upon the cushions and buried my face in my hands. Mara looked at me for long moments, then she rose and said gently, touching my shoulder with kindly hands:

"I must leave thee, Amina. I will try to think of something, but—but—I cannot give thee hope."

She watched me silently, then she said:

"Go to thy room, Amina, and rest. Thine eyes are heavy for sleep. Let me think, give me the burden—there may be a way, but as yet I cannot see it."

And touching my bowed head lightly with her lips, she left me.

XVIII

I do not know how long I sat where Mara left me. It seemed I could not move; my body was heavy with the burden of my heart. But at last I rose. I could not go to my chamber. I went to the garden. My feet were weighted as I walked slowly down the path. The birds sang to me; I did not hear their voices. Natara's favorite peacock came to me and spread his jeweled tail, asking for admira-

tion, which he considered his right; but I did not notice him.

I mounted the stair leading to the roof and took my favorite place beside the balustrade. I leaned my arms on the low wall and gazed over the countryside, at the villages in the distance looking like flocks of birds hovering under the great leaves of the palm-trees. But my eyes saw not, my ears heard not the sounds of life that came faintly to me.

As I sat brooding, the sound of a galloping horse came faintly to me, and at the same time I heard the tinkle of anklets, as Natara came to the roof beside me.

A rider turned into the path close beneath the wall. This small roadway connected the two main roads leading from the town, but was never used except by the bare feet of the passing villagers.

As the horse and rider came below me, the pace slackened and the rider looked up. I saw it was the young Englishman whom I had noticed at the durbar. I heard a

sound and, turning, saw Natara move back quickly from the balustrade, a rose flush mounting her face, creeping from bare rounded throat and losing itself in her hair. I watched her in astonishment. When the young man had passed, she crept to the balustrade, and watched him intently as he rode slowly on. He looked back as his horse joined the road leading to the country, and it seemed to me that he waved his hand, but I could not be sure.

Natara wandered aimlessly around the roof, humming a little song, now arranging a cushion, now taking a dying leaf from a rose, but coming back again and again to the balustrade, where she cast quick glances from lowered lids to the road up which the rider had passed.

I pondered her actions for a moment, but gave it little thought, as my heart was so burdened with sorrow that small things which would have at other times interested me, drifted idly by with scant notice.

XIX

The next day I waited in my apartments for Mara. She came, but brought no comfort to me. She said:

"There is nothing can be done, Amina. Natara must obey the head of the house."

I said nothing. There was nothing to say. I realized that my dear one was the Princess of a Royal House, and being so was nothing but a thing to be used in forwarding the interest of that house.

I called Natara and we three mounted to the roof. As usual, my women brought us cushions and placed fruits and sweetened drinks near by. We seated ourselves near the balustrade where we could look over the country. Mara sat quietly smoking cigarettes, a habit she had learned in foreign lands, and my heart was too heavy for the gossip with which we usually passed the time while on the housetop. Natara was also quiet and did not fill our ears with her girlish chatter, but sat quietly weaving

a garland of flowers to be used in the evening worship.

At last we heard the sound of galloping hoofs, and, as on the evening before, the young Englishman slackened his pace as he passed beneath the wall. Natara leaned a tiny bit over the balustrade, then moved back quickly. Mara raised herself from the cushions and peered down upon the rider.

"Ah, it is Neil Thornton," she said.

"Who is he?" I asked.

"He is a young attaché in the English service, attached at present to the Residency here. An awfully nice boy. I wonder where he is going?"

She watched him as he turned into the main road, then she said, "Oh, I see. This is a short-cut to the road leading to the polo-field."

As he left the pathway he turned and distinctly waved his hand. Mara watched him in amazement, then turned wondering eyes to me. She saw that I was as much

nonplused as she. Then she turned and looked intently at Natara. The hot blood mounted to Natara's brow.

Mara regarded the blushing face before her. She stood up and looked at the retreating figure on horseback. She turned and looked again at Natara, then she slowly sat down. She lighted another cigarette and did not speak for many moments. Finally she called Natara.

"Natara, come here," she said.

Natara came and stood before her. Mara asked softly:

"Have you seen him pass before?"

"Yes, he passed yesterday," answered Natara.

"Only yesterday?" asked Mara.

"No—the day before," answered Natara softly.

"And—?" said Mara with a question in her voice.

"And the day before," answered Natara with a blush.

"Has he seen you?" asked Mara.

Natara hesitated. "Yes, I think so," she said quietly.

Mara did not speak again, but lay back on her cushions smoking one cigarette after another, watching the smoke-wreaths as they curled and passed into the evening air. At last she rose and left without mentioning the subject again.

XX

The next day it was the same. In the afternoon Mara came and we all three went to the roof. We sat there talking quietly of many things, the events occurring in the city and the gossip of the court, until the galloping horse was heard. I did not move, but looked in the direction of the sound. Mara rose and peered down at the rider. She watched him until at the bend of the path he turned and waved his hand. Then she, much to my surprise and consternation, waved hers in return.

Nothing that Mara did would cause me

much surprise, as she was no longer an Indian woman in anything except appearances. She could not be judged by our standards. She had imbibed the ideas of freedom from women of the West, and her code and mine were oceans apart. Consequently I said nothing, but I am afraid my face reflected too well my thoughts, because Mara looked at me and laughed.

"You are shocked, Amina. Shocked to the center of your being, are you not?"

"I must confess," I said, "it is not the usual thing for a woman to wave to a stranger from our palace roof."

"No," said Mara, coolly. "I want him to think it was Natara who waved."

"What!" I exclaimed. I could say nothing more.

"Yes," she repeated. "I want him to think it was Natara who waved."

I could only look at Mara with wonder in my eyes. Then I asked, "Why?"

Mara moved her cushions over beside me; then, turning to Natara, said:

"Natara, take your women and go down for a time. I want to talk with Amina and do not wish listening ears near by."

Natara laughed.

"You think you will have secrets from me? No, Amina will tell me as soon as you are gone. I like secrets, too."

Laughing, she went down the stairway, followed by the three or four women who were at all times in attendance upon her. When we heard them in the courtyard, Mara turned to me.

"Amina, I have a plan, a wild plan it seems when I try to put it into words. But it came to me last night when I was lying awake trying to think of some way to help you. You remember that I said, being an *Indian* woman, there was no escape for Natara. She could not go to a foreign land, as she would be sent back. But if she were *not* an Indian woman, if she were married to a man of another race, she would take the nationality of her husband, and even a Ma-

harajah could not take her from her husband."

I looked at her inquiringly, not clearly understanding nor following where she was trying to lead me. Then she said, a little impatiently:

"That boy who passed here is English, the only son of a great house in England. We will marry him to Natara, then she will be free."

I flung her hand from my shoulder and rose.

"What!" I cried. "Marry an Englishman!" and the scorn I felt for the race was echoed in my voice.

Mara drew me down beside her.

"Don't get excited, Amina," she said soothingly, "until you hear all I have to say. Why should she not marry an Englishman? He is of blood as good as hers, she would not be losing caste except here in India, and I hope that when once she leaves these shores she will never return to them. She would have an opportunity

of living a life of freedom of which you could not even dream. She would have her chance for happiness, Amina, and it is her *only* chance."

I was quiet. I could not think clearly. Natara marry an Englishman! I knew little of the English. I had never cared to see the women who from time to time came to the Court to be received by the Maharanee. Many of our women watched them from behind the screens, and when again in their own apartments, made unkind remarks regarding their appearance. The long faces of the foreign women, their great noses, their untidy hair, their little, colorless eyes, and their ugly, ungraceful gowns, all were discussed with much laughter as we women clustered around those who had assisted at the audience. We screamed with glee as one of our pretty girls dressed herself as nearly as possible to look like the ugly wife of the Resident, and mimicked her walk and her high, falsetto voice.

Stories came to us of the home life of

the English, of the manner in which they lived in our land. Many things were brought to our ears, gossip, unkind gossip, which plainly showed that English men do not guard carefully their womenfolk. Yet what could one expect from a people where the wives and daughters are allowed to mingle freely, with unveiled faces, with men? Where they receive men in their homes while their husbands are absent. It seemed to us, sheltered and guarded lovingly within the purdah, that every canon of decency and respectability was broken by these, our conquerors from over the seas.

But as I sat there I was not thinking of the morals of the women of England. It was of the men I was thinking. I remembered that Mara had told the Rajah that an Englishman had but *one* wife. That must mean that they loved but one woman with a love that endured, or they would certainly choose another wife. One does not live all one's life with a woman for whom there is no love in the heart.



*THE new Hindu Temple is one of
Calcutta's treasures.*

I thought, if Natara could be the *only* wife of a man! If she could know that he would love and cherish her all her days, even when her face was lined and her hair was white. If she could live, knowing that each day did not bring nearer the knowledge that soon another and a younger woman would supplant her in her husband's heart. If she could give all of her love without fear, without the certain knowledge that it was wasted. If she could feel that no one else shared in the love of her Prince, and that she need not fear hourly that a new face might be added to those within her kingdom and her day of royalty be over. I sighed. I knew these dreams were impossible within a palace, but—and I heard Mara say again:

“Her *only* chance for happiness.”

Finally I said:

“But he, Mara. What about him? I do not want Natara to marry a man who does not want her. It is love I am seeking for her, not simply freedom.”

Mara sank back on her cushions with a low laugh, and began puffing again at her interminable cigarette. She saw that I would at least listen to her plan.

“Amina, do you not realize how beautiful Natara is? Seeing her each day, you have grown accustomed to her, but she is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen upon this earth. No man could see her and not love her. Our boy there is young, impressionable, is filled with the poetry of the East. He is looking for romance to peer from behind each enclosing wall, is waiting for a hand to beckon him. We will let it be the hand of Natara.

“We will let him find here a love such as he has never dreamed, luxury of which he has never read even in his most extravagant books of fairy tales, and such a girl as his wildest imagination could not conceive. We will woo him with flowers, with perfume, with music and with jewels, with all of the luxury of an Eastern court. We will transport him to Mohammed’s para-

dise, and it will mean only Natara to him."

I listened to her and my breath came quickly.

"Yes, he will love her," I said. "She is made for love as perfume is made for the rose."

Mara was impatient with me.

"Love her? We will send him mad with love."

I was quiet for a moment, thinking; then I said:

"But, Mara, Englishmen do not marry Indian women, nor do Indian women of the better class marry with the English. It is breaking the code of both nations."

Mara studied her cigarette for a time, then she looked at me with a little frown between her eyes.

"Yes, I know that. I realize it fully. I have not figured it out—I know it is not done. It seems impossible—it is a mad idea, but I am at my wit's end."

We were both silent. Finally I said:

"It cannot be done, Mara. You know

that the few English women who have braved the opinion of their countrymen and married men of our race, when they come to India they are not received either by their own people or by us. They must live in a world by themselves. And as for the women who give themselves to an Englishman—no one of our class would think of such a thing. A woman who does it is looked upon as lower than a pariah."

"Yes, you are right, Amina. I understand thoroughly, and—and—but Natara is a Princess Royal."

"Even marriage with a Princess Royal would be considered a disgrace in English eyes," I said bitterly. "You say this boy is in the Indian Civil Service, his father was in it before him, his grandfather. He has inherited the feelings, the prejudices of all English in regard to the subject people they govern. Even a Princess is a 'native' in his eyes, I am sure. He would not *consider* marriage."

"You are right, Amina, he would not consider marriage with what he calls a 'na-

tive' woman. But—as I said, we will drive him mad with love. Give me time and I will give that boy a glimpse of heaven, and he will dare anything to keep it."

"But what would he do, where would he go? He could not remain in India. He could not remain in the Service."

"No, he could not remain in the Service, but why should he? I want him to take Natara to England and never return to this country. In England it would only be remembered that Natara was a Royal Princess—she is rich, fabulously rich in English eyes—they would have the whole world open before them, with the exception of India, and perhaps in time they could return here for a visit, as conditions are changing. But—it is the only thing I see for Natara unless she goes to Naranabad, and we should risk anything to save her from that fate."

"But Achmed—Naranabad—what will they do?"

"I don't know, Amina. I am frank with you. I haven't figured it out as yet. I must

have time to make my plans more complete. I hope they will not discover it until Natarā is on her way to England. Until she is the wife of an Englishman. This betrothal to Naranabad is not known as yet; Naranabad would not want it known, it would make him the laughing stock of his world. Achmed would have to submit as gracefully as he could, as he would not want to quarrel with the English. He is in enough trouble with them now on his own account. He realizes that he is a little shaky upon his throne, and would not care to start a quarrel. He might feel that it would be a bond, to have the Royal Princess marry the only son of a great house in England. Especially as that house has influence in Indian affairs. He might, after the marriage was really made, feel that he could use it to his own advantage—and he needs all the influence he can get now with the powers that be."

She was quiet, and I left her alone to her thoughts. I went to the courtyard below

and busied myself for a while, then returned to the roof. Mara looked at me.

“Amina, this boy must not know who Natara is, he must not see anything except the romance, the love, the beauty. He must not think. The thought of marriage will not enter his mind; it would revolt him, with his training and his Englishman’s instincts. But we must make him so mad with love that he will throw all training, all traditions to the winds to possess the woman he loves. We can only plan the one thing now, gain his love and trust to the future that will in some way see the fulfilment of our plans. I will think, think, Amina—a way will be found.”

She left me and I sat there long into the night, dreaming new dreams for my loved one, seeing new visions, wondering, fearing, hoping.

XXI

I can offer no excuse for what we did.
For the purdah woman, a woman who had

the blood of generations of purdah women in her veins, I was breaking every law and principle of my caste. We are taught that we must live behind the lattice. That no man, with the exception of father or brother, must look upon our face until our marriage night, when the husband's hand may raise the veil. We may not woo nor be wooed until after the marriage vows are taken, and whether love comes to us or not, those vows are final. Any woman of my caste in India would sooner mount the funeral pyre than do what Mara and I were planning to do.

Yet—perhaps there is an excuse for me. I had passed my life in the women's quarters of an Eastern court, where all thought, all action, centered around the one theme—love. Where women passed their lives in beautifying themselves, going to any lengths to enhance their charms that they might hold the love of their lord. We are given love stories to feed the youthful imag-

ination, we listen to women who prattle of only one thing—love.

Yet I had seen only one real love, that of the Rajah for my beloved Princess. The passion that the present Rajah exhibited for first one favorite and then another was not love, and I saw the unhappiness, the jealousy and sorrow that it brought. I saw women break their vials of love before his feet like a fragrance. I saw new faces brought to the palace filled with triumph at their victory, never fearing nor caring for the looks of hatred that glared at them from black eyes. They thought their reign would endure forever. Then I saw the look of happiness give way to looks of wonder, then of pain. The pain gave place to anger, jealousy, and in many cases to acts of madness, when, instead of love philters, white hands brewed poisons which were slyly given to hated rivals. We have had tragedies within our courtyards, sudden deaths, and then the swift retribution when the offending one was taken to a dreary

place outside the city, there to pass her days in loneliness and exile.

I had watched it all these many years, and I had long ago decided that if my hands were not made powerless, Natara should be guarded from that life of jealousy and dread.

She should find love, not what that word means within a palace courtyard.

XXII

We gave no inkling of our secret to Natara. We kept her from the housetop, much to her displeasure.

It was all so simple; afternoons spent upon the roof waiting for the galloping rider. A look over the balustrade, dark eyes that gazed into blue ones, a smile, a wave of the hand, an almond-blossom thrown into the path before the rider, or a flower shyly touched to lips, then dropped into eager, uplifted hands. It was not Natara's hand that dropped the flower, nor

her black eyes into which those blue eyes gazed so ardently. But eyes when partially veiled and viewed from a distance are all the same, and those of Mara were just as black and perhaps more seductive than would have been those of the frightened Natara.

A few days passed with nothing but the exchange of glances, then Mara said to me:

“Amina, send away the women whom you cannot trust. Keep the slaves and the musicians, but no one in whom you have not the most implicit confidence. See that you alone have the key to the door that opens to the palace.”

I said: “I alone have that key, except the one kept by the Rajah. He has the right to enter at will. I cannot forbid his entrance. He is our King and no door within his realm can be closed to him.”

Gradually I found cause to send one woman to her home for a visit, others to friends in distant towns, until there were none within our palace except the women

who were mine completely, who would obey me either through love or fear. They were my property, my chattels, the same as the peacock upon the wall, and my will was law to them.

Finally when all was arranged according to Mara's wishes, a note was dropped along with an almond-blossom, the flower of love. It told the eager boy to come to the western gate at sunset of the next day.

XXIII

Mara came to me early the next afternoon and we spent with Natara long hours in the perfumed waters of the bath. Dexterous hands rubbed her soft body with crushed flowers until she exhaled the faint, sweet odor of jasmine from her very fingertips. The soles of her feet were tinted with the red paste of the Ashoka petals and jeweled sandals were placed upon them. A sari of rose gauze was wrapped around her body, one end draped over her midnight

hair, leaving her right arm and shoulder bare except for the pearls with which we partially covered them. Pearls were placed about her throat and we stood back to see the effect of our handiwork. She looked like the bud of a rose. She had a beauty that caught your breath as you gazed upon it.

Natara was not surprised nor especially interested on the fateful afternoon, as we supervised her adornment. Women of the purdah spend endless hours in the baths each day, and in choosing special gowns and jewels. It is a thing of which they never tire—the adornment of their pretty persons.

When all was finished, when Natara's appearance suited even the exacting taste of Mara, she said to Natara:

“Go pick me some blossoms from the tree by the western gate. I wish to take them to a friend in the city, who, unlike you, does not have the flowers to make a wreath for her gods.”

Natara left us and slowly wandered down the pathway. Her favorite peacocks came to her and she caressed them. They followed her, watching with seeming interest as she reached up to pick the rich clusters of bloom.

Mara and I did not speak for a time. I, because my heart was beating so loudly in my breast that I feared it might be heard. For a moment I wished to recall my dear one going so innocently towards that fateful gate which would open for her into an unknown world, a world of love and romance. Would that gate bring happiness or sorrow?

Mara read my face and, coming closer to me, said softly:

"What a beautiful thing is youth! See her there before that gate through which she has never passed, not knowing that through it, all is coming to her, that love and life wait at the gates of her garden—this beautiful garden of dreams."

It was the hour of sunset. Over the chain

of hills the red sun went down. It flooded the garden with deep rose, while the sky merged into gold and purple and lastly into a sea of light mingled with fire.

We who watched, waited in breathless silence as a knock was heard on the door. The great gate was swung slowly inward by the gatekeeper. We saw the boy's face as it was framed in the shadow. No word was spoken. It seemed as if the noises of the dying day were stilled to greet his coming. The fragrance of unseen flowers came to him, and standing under a tree covered with glorious, flame-colored blossoms, two peacocks with great fan-like spreading trains beside her, was a figure, lissom, willowy, only half concealed by the flowing gauze that enveloped it.

A startled face, colorless yet suggesting a glow behind it, with great, passionate, dreaming, wistful eyes, shadowed by the gauze of the veil, was turned to him. He stopped. It seemed for the moment that the vision was unreal. Then he started for-

ward and stretched his hands towards this being who appeared half woman and half dream.

Natara hesitated for a moment, frightened, wondering, not understanding—then she went to him.

The great gate closed silently behind them.

XXIV

Love is a divine essence working through and through innumerable lives for its own glory. We love instinctively, and to those two standing there, something new and unknown touched them with its magic wand, and the old-time miracle worked its will once more.

They did not need to speak. Their souls spoke to each other from their inner world.

XXV

The silence was broken by the faint sound of a bell in the distant temple. It brought

the boy to life as, bending down, he took the hands that were holding the flowers and kissed them. The odor of jasmine came from her finger-tips.

Natara's face rivaled the flowers in color, but she did not withdraw her hand, and after a moment, hand in hand like a pair of children, they came up the pathway, that was filled with the scent of blossoms, where even the air seemed to murmur with some hidden joy.

They entered the palace where the women were putting scented oil in the silver lamps which sent forth a penetrating, aromatic odor that breathes of the East.

Natara led the boy to the stairway opening on to the roof. He gave but one glance to the scene spread out before him, then turned to Natara. He drew her to one of the cushions near the balustrade and seated her gently, then remained standing in front of her to watch this glorious thing that had come to him inside the magic gateway.

A boy passed along the path below them.

His voice came to them faintly as he sang his even-song. It was as sweet as Krishna's flute calling lovingly across the meadows. It had the music of the hills, the color and scent of the roses, the swaying of the forests, the rippling of the water in its faint, sweet tones which drifted farther and farther away, until lost in the distance.

Women came to the roof and lighted incense in the braziers. They brought fruits and cakes and sweetened drinks and placed them on low tables, but neither of the two sitting there so silently seemed to see or hear them.

They were together, that was enough. The outside world was closed to them. They saw only each other.

The night wind came up, scented with warm tropical perfumes. The day was done and shadows hid under the trees. After a time the soft witchery of the moon-light filtered through the palm-trees, bathing them in its mystic light. The trees



LIFE on a houseboat in Kash-mir is full of delight.

whispered together and threw ink-black shadows as they swayed softly in the evening breeze. Dark bodies came and went in the village below, which was half hidden in the dark green jack-fruit trees, the banana and the slender areca palm, among which fireflies gleamed like watchmen with their tiny lanterns.

A light laugh was heard as a little boy with shaven head and naked brown body ran to a woman who was rubbing a drinking-pot, turning it round and round in her hands. The sound of unseen bells and conchs came from the distant temple.

Neil leaned to Natara, raised her and drew her to him. He bent her head and, looking into her eyes, found what he sought, and then he kissed her. For a moment Natara was motionless, then joy like a mist clouded her eyes, and lifting her face to the eager one bending over her, she returned his kiss.

They stood together, he holding her close

to him, so close she could feel the throbbing of his heart; then I came towards them, and told them he must go.

Slowly, hand in hand, they descended the stairway and walked down the path until they came to the gate beside which stood a slave. As the gate swung open, Neil again took Natara in his arms and, looking into her eyes, said, with lips against her lips, "To-morrow?"

And Natara answered softly, "To-morrow."

Natara stood where Neil had left her. Even the murmur of the palm-trees was stilled and only the soft hush of the darkness was around her. She stood there, her lids lowered and motionless, her hands clasped on her bosom, her whole being absorbed in the wonder of this new beautiful thing that had come to her.

XXVI

Lovers have always come through the evenings of the past. Each night Natara's

lover came to her when the fires of sunset were burning low and the Western sky was a golden flame. Love grew among the scented flowers as they wandered hand in hand within the garden. They were like children, they played seek and find among the trees, they called the stately peacocks from their wall and teased them with their offerings. They threw fruit and cakes to the bands of monkeys that went swinging through the trees, but stayed their flight to chatter angrily and greedily snatch the shower of sweets. They made tiny boats of lotus-petals and sent them filled with wishes across the dark blue waters of the lake.

At first Neil seemed not to understand his surroundings: it was all so new and strange to him. But I could see that his soul was filled with the beauty. He would stand for long moments before the flowered scrolls of lace-like marble that were the windows, or he would touch with caressing fingers the marble flowers inset with jewels that formed the arches and panels of the rooms. The

life of the palace seemed a dream life, as if when the gate was shut behind him, he entered another world from that in which he passed his days.

He, with Natara, at the Hour of Peace, would follow the women who lighted the scented oil in the silver lamps, and he watched with curiosity the evening worship as they walked around the tulsi-plant and chanted the even-song. One night Natara took him to her own small temple and showed him Madan upon his throne. "It is our god, the God of Love. Surely you will not deny him your worship!"

With a laugh he scattered magnolia-petals upon the head of the god, and after that each night at Time of Peace they silently stole away to strew the little room with flowers.

There before their God of Love he would take her in his arms and whisper words to her and touch her lips with his, until the temple of Madan became for them a Paradise.

XXVII

They were not always alone nor wandering in the garden. When the purple twilight began to darken the violet hills, and the golden sun was replaced by stars, I sent for them and placed them upon the balcony that overlooked the courtyard. Slaves were there to pass them fruits and sweets, or to move the air with silken, perfumed fans.

From there they watched, themselves unseen, the dancers in the court below. These beautiful slender bodies turned and writhed and threw out their arms in acts of sweet abandon, until at last they fell as if worn out with their own great madness. When dancers withdrew into the shadowed archways, the singers took their places and intoned in soft, low voices, songs of love and sacrifice.

XXVIII

Evenings when the moon's light was white and brilliant, I sent them to the lake,

where the boat awaited them. There, lying lazily upon a divan, they were slowly rowed around the lake by women rowers whose brown bodies, clothed only in garments of flowers, rose and fell with regular movements as they chanted and rowed to the rhythm of their song. Young girls came from the shore and, grasping the ropes of roses that trailed from the boat, swam along its sides, adding their sweet young voices to the rowers' chant. As the boat passed close to the shores, flowers were flung from unseen hands, or pretty, laughing girls, looking like fairies amongst the shadows of the trees, scattered white petals upon their heads.

Stationed around the lake, hidden by the darkness, soft music came to them faintly over the water. A clear voice sang the verse of an old love song, then the refrain was taken up by others:

"I hunger for thee till my whole frame is weak
Oh, give me the food that I hungrily seek. . . ."

. . . the words swelling out on the evening air then becoming softer as they drifted away from the singers. Then from another part of the lake came another verse:

"The streams of thy love will new life bestow
On the dry thirsty fields where its sweet waters flow."

Those nights upon the lake were dream nights, with music the enchanter. Music that came from over the water, now nearer, now farther, receding, coming, always eluding. Music incredibly mysterious and remote, rising and falling in passionate rhythm, pulsing in sweetness, lingering in tenderness, dominated ever by its own sadness. Eastern music with its minor tones that sang of love in endless measure. Magic music sung by perfect voices with throb of drum and flute and veena. Music that made the pulses beat, the face flush. The night was filled with its melody.

XXIX

All memories may fade from me like the flowers from the almond-tree, but the memory of the beauty of this love that I watched grow day by day will stay with me until I hear the Watchman call and life is done.

XXX

One night when the moon had flooded the earth with its silver light, Neil and Natara went to the lake to listen to the music. It came to them softly over the water, the soft thrum of the strings and the distant monotonous beat of the drums, hardly heard above the faint voices of the singers. When the last tones drifted away, Neil drew a deep breath, as if wakening from a dream.

"I am dreaming, Natara! This beautiful thing cannot be true. This is an enchanted garden. It is not real!"

Natara laughed.

"My garden is not enchanted, Neil.

There is no magic within its gates, nor in the moonlight, nor in the whiteness of the sun. The magic is within our hearts."

Neil drew her to him.

"Will it last, Natara?" he asked. "Will it last? Will you always love me?"

Natara gave a happy, contented laugh.

"Thou hast sown within my heart the seed of love, which will grow in strength, as trailing creepers grow in length with each new season. Thou hast bound me with a twisted rope and so long as the sun and moon are within the skies, I am thine, thine own, part of thee."

As they strolled down the pathway to the gate, Natara said:

"How I love this pathway! When I came down it in other days I did not see its beauty, but now it leads to my beloved, it leads me to the gate through which comes my happiness."

Neil held her long in his arms; then, as the waiting slave turned impatiently, he kissed her and was gone.

Natara stood as the great gate closed, then turned, a happy smile on her lips, the sound of retreating footsteps beating in her heart, feeling still around her her lover's arms.

XXXI

Natara raised her eyes and there before her stood her cousin, the Maharajah. They looked at each other in silence. At last, after what seemed an eternity to Natara, he spoke, with a sneer upon his lips and black anger in his voice.

“So this is the way you spend your nights within your garden!”

Natara said nothing.

“You have a lover and an Englishman!”

The Rajah could scarcely control his voice, and Natara trembled at the tone of rage and hate. Still she did not speak and the Rajah made a quick stride and stood in front of her.

“Tell me, how long has this been going on? Tell me, I say!”

He grasped her by the arm. Natara did not answer, and after looking at her with eyes of rage for a moment, he turned and strode towards the palace, Natara walking slowly behind him. As they entered, I, who had seen the meeting, came forward. The King stopped and looked at me.

"What do you mean by allowing such a thing to go on!"

"I do not understand, Your Highness," I said.

"You do not understand! You saw what I saw to-night, Natara in the arms of that young Englishman from the Residency."

"What do you want to know?" I asked, trying to gain time to think.

"I want to know how long this disgraceful thing has been going on!" he said, in such a cold, hard voice, that it frightened even me, who am not afraid of any man, even a King.

"I do not see the disgrace," I said, untruthfully.

"You do not," almost shouted the Rajah.

“You, an Indian woman, say that? To meet a man unveiled, she, the daughter of a King? To be unveiled the same as a pariah? To be alone with a man, and one of that race I hate? No man has ever seen her face except her father and I since she went behind the purdah. She would be ruined if it were known. There will be no question of marriage for even a Princess if this tale is told. But I ask how long has this been going on?”

“Not long. I cannot tell you the exact time,” I answered.

“Oh, you can’t!” sneered the Rajah. “There are others who can. Asta!” he called to one of the waiting-women.

“You shall not question Asta,” I said. “She is nothing but a slave.”

“Yes,” he said, “but slaves know the truth.”

“She will not tell you, nor will you find out from Natarā’s household,” I said.

“Oh, I will not!” came back sharp and quick from the King, with a cruel ring in

his voice. "There is a way to make slaves speak."

I stepped in front of him, my eyes flashing.

"Your Highness, you dare not touch our women."

"I will do with your women what I will if they do not answer my question," he said. "We still have whips in the palace and strong arms to wield them."

At his words Natara stepped forward and faced the King, every line of her body tense with anger.

"You dare not touch my women, Achmed, nor dare you send one of your brutes to my palace to torture them! The slaves are mine, to obey me. They shall not suffer for it. Your word is not law within *my walls*."

The Rajah turned to Natara.

"Oh, you have found your voice!" he sneered. "Then you will tell me what I wish if you do not want your women hurt."

Natara looked at the brutal, dark face,

at the straight, cruel lips, and for a moment she was silent, her head downcast. Then she raised her head and moved closer to the King, who had thrown himself upon a divan.

"Yes, I will tell you what you wish to know," she said in a low voice.

"When did you first see the Englishman?" he asked.

"At the great durbar for Naranabad," she answered.

"But behind the screens?" he said.

"Yes," she answered.

"When again?" curtly.

"Each day as he went past to the polo-grounds."

"How did you see him?"

"I saw him from the palace roof."

"Did he see you?" he asked.

"Not at first," she answered.

"When did he first see you?"

"About two or three weeks ago."

"When did he first come into the garden?"



PAGODAS and animal images made from huge boulders in the seventh century have been excavated near Madras.

"About a week ago, I think," she answered.

The Rajah was quiet for a time, then he said :

"Why have you seen this Englishman?"

Natara did not answer at once; then she lifted her head and faced the cruel face opposite her.

"Because I love him," she answered quietly.

The King looked at her in amazement. Finally he sneered :

"You love him! Bah! I suppose you think he loves you!"

"Yes, he does," said Natara.

"Love! An Englishman love! What is that old saying? The gods gave the Indian nine-tenths of the passion of the world, the other tenth, like beggars' dole, was flung to men of colder clime. Love! An Englishman!"

Natara spoke softly.

"I know you will not understand. I am speaking of *love*."

“So am I. What can you know of love, shut here behind the palace walls! What do you know—tell me.”

“I do not know, except that love dawned in my heart as the sun when he came,” she answered in a low voice.

The Rajah shrugged his shoulders.

“Well, I am glad that I came in time. No harm is done. I presume no one need know about it. We will hasten your marriage before Naranabad hears of it, and this little thing will be forgotten.”

Natara stepped forward, a frightened look on her face.

“But, Achmed, I cannot marry Naranabad,” she said. “I love Neil.” She put out her hand and touched the shoulder of the Rajah. “I cannot marry Naranabad.”

“You will marry Naranabad. We will commence the preparations at once.”

“But I cannot, Achmed, I cannot. I love Neil. I love him,” she repeated, as if the repetition of her words must convince the

King of the impossibility of her being given to another.

The King laughed, and it made an ugly sound.

“Love—you do not know what love is, I say. You will love Naranabad just the same. In a month you will be his wife, then you can tell him what love is.”

Then fear left Natara.

“Love—it is you who do not know its meaning. Within your cruel, dead heart could not be kindled even the tiniest flame of love. You cannot understand. Ah, Achmed,” and her voice broke a little, “if you knew what is within our hearts you could not speak so lightly of giving me to another.”

The Rajah looked at her face for a time, studying it curiously, then he drawled:

“What is this thing within your hearts? But speak of yourself. Perhaps,” and he looked at her with narrowing eyes, “I might—I only say I might—reconsider if you can

make me see this love you say you feel—and that I do not understand."

Natara made a quick step towards him and a light came to her eyes. Perhaps he would not be so hard, perhaps when he understood how dearly she and Neil loved each other, he would not send her to Nar-anabad. She did not realize that it is as impossible to explain love to him who has not felt it, as the glories of the mogra-tree to one who is blind.

As she stood before him, her dark eyes filled with passion, a flush on her cheek, her small body tense with the strain, she made a very pretty picture. The Rajah appreciated it and leaned back on his cushions and watched her through half-closed eyes. No one could tell what was beneath those lids, nor what passed through his mind.

Natara's half-clenched hand went to her breast as she stepped towards the King.

"Shall I tell you, Achmed? Will you understand?"

Then she restrained not her tongue. She

spoke in the fulness of her love, for the sake of that love.

"What is love? Ah, Achmed, I love Neil as the lotus loves the water. My life has become a garden. Love has taught me the meanings of the whispers in flowers and sunsets. I know now why there is music in the wind. We have been so happy here in our garden. It has seemed as if even the birds flying amongst the roses devoured their hearts with envy at the sight of our happiness. I have dreamed all my life of the lover who would come to me, and my dreams have come true. I have always dreaded the darkness, but now I know that the shadows of night will bring him to me and I watch for them with eagerness. When I stand at the gateway and listen for his footsteps, my heart beats so wildly that I cannot hear his knock. Ah, Achmed, can I make you understand what it means to love?" and she stretched out her hands towards him. "I am his lute, his veena. He can draw from me what melody it

pleases him and none but him can bring it forth."

She stopped. The King watched each emotion as it passed over her beautiful face. He was silent for a moment, then he rose.

"Very pretty, Natara. Very pretty. You can bring all that wonderful love to Naranabad. He is an expert in—love. It will interest him—for a time," and he laughed a hateful laugh.

Natara stepped backward and the color left her face.

"But, Achmed, you said you would not send me to Naranabad."

"I said—what did I say?" sneered the King.

"You said if I would tell you, you would reconsider. That you would not send me to Naranabad if you understood the depths of my love. And I have told you. I have tried to make you understand."

"No, I did not," the Rajah replied curtly. "I said I might reconsider. I wanted to know what a young girl considered love,

and it has been most amusing and instructive. But you go to Naranabad as soon as the arrangements can be made."

"Achmed—Achmed—" she cried. "I cannot! You will not do such a thing. You cannot!"

"What other alternative is there?" he asked.

"I—I—do not know—I have not thought—perhaps I—I can marry Neil and go to his country," she answered.

"You would go to that far-off cold country, amongst a people you do not understand?" he asked.

"A prison would be a rose garden if shared with him," she replied softly.

"You will not go with him, remember that," he said harshly.

"I will, Achmed. You may be King, but I am a Princess Royal, the daughter of a King, and you cannot control me."

"I cannot?" he said. "We will see."

At that moment Mara entered the courtyard. She stopped at sight of the expres-

sions on the faces before her, and would have turned and left the court.

The Rajah regarded her as she stood hesitatingly before the archway; then a look of understanding seemed to come over his face. He turned his gaze from her to me, and a sneer curled his lips and a crafty, venomous light came into his eyes.

As she stepped back he called to her. "Stay, Mara."

She stopped.

He beckoned to her. "Come here."

She came and bowed before him.

He watched her for a moment. "So, I see. You are in this. It is some plan of yours. Amina would not dare and Natara hasn't enough brains to do a thing like this. What has been your idea?"

Mara held her head up proudly, a flush on her face.

"I do not understand you, Your Highness. Plan? What plan?"

"Yes, you understand me. How did that Englishman get in this garden if he were

not brought in? And why should he be brought in? Amina wouldn't do it. You have done this—and why?"

Mara did not answer.

"You don't intend to tell me, I see. Well—I can't have you whipped, but perhaps I can figure it out for myself."

He sat silently for a time, watching Mara from his half-closed lids. Then he laughed, a nasty laugh that grated on the ears.

"I think I see it. You thought you could save, I presume you would call it, save Natara from Naranabad. But why an Englishman—they don't marry 'natives,'" and he sneered. "Were you thinking of having her run away with this man? Had you rather have her the mistress of an Englishman than Naranabad's Queen?"

Mara stepped towards the Rajah.

"How dare you, Achmed!"

"Did you think he would marry her?"

"Why not?" said Mara. "She is a Princess, he is of good family—why should they not marry?"

He laughed again. "So you *had* planned it! Natara was to marry an Englishman and become an English lady. Great idea! How about my consent?"

Mara did not reply. He waited a moment for an answer.

"I presume my consent was not to be asked."

"No, Achmed, your consent was not to be asked. I knew it would be useless. But, Achmed, why shouldn't Natara marry this boy? Why should she not go to England with him? There she would be an Indian Princess married to an English noble. She has charm, beauty, great wealth—there would not be any stigma attached to the marriage there. Neil could be placed in the Indian foreign office; he need not come back here. They could have a happy, wonderful life there together. Why not give her this chance for happiness? You know as well as I that her life as Narana-bad's Queen would be only a mockery. Be big, Achmed; be kind. Let her go."

Achmed gave her a long look, a menacing look, then he said in a low voice: "Never! Next month Natara goes to Naranabad."

Natara stepped forward.

"I will *not!*" she said. "I will not go to him."

The King turned to her.

"Listen to me, Natara. You say you love this Englishman. If all this rubbish you have told me is true, then you will not care to ruin him. You know—or Mara knows, and I want her to hear all I have to say—you know the English do not interfere with our home affairs. It is fatal for an Englishman to even try to look behind our purdahs. Our women must not be molested, and their quarters are sacred even to that vandal race. Hear me, Natara—if you see this boy again, I will see that he is ruined. I will see that he is recalled in disgrace and no power can ever reinstate him. His future, as far as India is concerned, will be a blank. He comes of a

family of Civil Service men, a family of diplomats. Their men have held office in India from the time of the English occupation. His grandfather was a viceroy, his father was a governor, and the son is intended to follow in their footsteps. With Naranabad and me against him, nothing can save him. England would not dare go against us. He will be utterly and forever ruined. I will follow him with my vengeance until he is in his grave."

Natara touched the Rajah's arm.

"But, Achmed, why should you ruin him? You would not do this thing. You would not!"

The Rajah flung her hand from his arm.

"I will use every means in my power, and Naranabad will do the same, to see that he is thoroughly disgraced. I will see that the foreign office dare not give him even a clerk's position. I will make of him a crossing-sweeper, so far as anything that touches India is concerned."

Natara stretched out her hands passionately towards the King.

"Achmed, you would not do this thing! You would not hurt me so! Even the hunter spares the bird that has taken refuge in his bosom. You will not be so cruel!"

The Rajah started towards the archway.

"There is nothing more to be said. If you see this boy again, I will do all that I have said and more if it is in my power to do it."

He was nearing the arch when Natara stepped towards him.

"Achmed, never see him again—"

The Rajah stopped. "Understand, never see him again. My guards will stand from now on at the western gate, and no one can enter from the palace unless I wish it."

Natara stepped towards the Rajah, and her voice was low and tense.

"Now, Achmed, you have given me your commands. I will speak and you will listen to me. I will see Neil once more,

I will hear from his lips what it means to him, this loss of position that you seem to think so great. I will see him once more."

The Rajah strode towards her and took her by the arm.

"See him? Never! You will never see him again. Do you understand me?"

Natara looked up into his face, and her own was set and white.

"Do you understand *me*, Achmed? I will see him—to-morrow night. I will talk with him—alone. You do not want a scandal at your court. You do not want the Royal Princess to be found lying broken on the pathway beneath her palace wall. You do not want the Resident to inquire too closely into what would cause the death of Princess Natara. You will place no guard at the western gate to-morrow night."

The King looked at the white face. Then after a moment he said:

"Will you promise me that it will be for the last time?"



*A MAGNIFICENT gopura gate to the
Sri-Rangam Temple in Trichinopoly.*

"Yes," said Natara, "if what you say is true, if marrying me would mean his ruin, if he prizes the position which you seem to think he values so highly, I will promise never to see him again. But I *will* see him once more."

The Rajah was silent for a time, then he turned to me.

"Amina, for the last time your slave will be at the gate, to-morrow night."

He turned and left the court.

When the sound of the Rajah's footsteps died away, Mara rose from where she had fallen on the cushions, and raged up and down the room like a lion chained.

"How dare he, the brute! How dare he!" She turned to me. "How did he come to enter? You said he rarely came to your palace. Why did you not have a guard placed by the palace door? Why did he come?"

"I cannot tell. It may have been simply a fancy of his to see me or to see Natara. Or, there may be spies within our gates.

One can never tell. There were some strange dancing girls—”

“But why did you not guard the doorway? You have been careless, Amina.”

“I have not been careless,” I replied gently. “I cannot guard against the Rajah. He has the right to enter when he wills. No guard could stop him. He has his guards on the other side of the door, what good to place mine on this side? He is the Rajah, remember.”

Natara went to Mara and took her by the arm.

“Never mind, Mara. It is done. But tell me, Mara, would it ruin Neil if I went to him?”

Mara led Natara to a couch and drew her down beside her. She put her face in her hands and did not speak for long moments. Then she looked up and her face was drawn and tired.

“Yes, Natara. It would ruin Neil if Achmed should make trouble. I always knew that Neil could not come back to

India—but—yes, if Naranabad joined with Achmed, Neil's career would be finished. It is true that the English must not look behind our purdahs. They are closed to them, and any one who dares to enter has all the forces of both countries against him."

Natara looked at her, then said quietly:
"But why did you not think of this before, Mara?"

Mara beat her hands together.

"I did, I did—I have thought of it all! But I thought it could be done quietly, that the secret could be kept until you were on your way to England, and that Achmed, for his own sake, would not interfere after it was done. I had not finished my plans—it all has happened so suddenly—I thought —oh, if once I could have gotten you to England—"

She rose and paced up and down the room.

Natara watched her for a time, then said:

“But would it mean so much to Neil to lose his position?”

“It is not so much the position, dear, but the disgrace. I presume it would break his father’s heart. As the Rajah said, Neil comes of a long line of English rulers here in India. He is the last of his line, the last of his race. It is true, Natara, it would be ruin for Neil if two of the most powerful rulers in India demanded his recall. The English Government would not dare go against two men like Naranabad and Achmed. They are the strongest rulers in India and—and—they have the right on their side. But—I will not give up—there will be a way found—he hasn’t beaten me yet, Natara—”

Mara again began walking up and down, smoking one cigarette after another.

“I will find a way. You shall not go to Naranabad. Wait, Natara, I will find a way yet.”

Natara rose from the couch.

"Mara, I will see Neil to-morrow night, then I will find the way."

Mara turned to Natara.

"Natara, do not tell Neil. He will not give you up. We must have no scandal until we finally decide what we can do. He must not know—just give me a little time to think, to plan—"

"No," Natara said quietly. "He will not know, but I must hear from him the truth. I must know if my love would ruin him." She was silent for a few moments, walking slowly up and down the room. She stopped in front of Mara, and stretched her hands towards her imploringly.

"Help me, Mara. I do not understand. I would leave both worlds to follow him. What are rank and position where there is love? Neil will not give me up."

"No, Natara, Neil will not give you up—he will not have to. We will find a way. Oh, I was so sure that we could get you to England before it would be discovered. I would go with you myself—I was so sure

that Achmed would not dare do anything—where have I made the mistake—but we will carry it out, Natara, we will *not* give up."

Mara turned to Natara.

"To-morrow night when you see him, say nothing. He is a hot-headed, passionate boy; he would act rashly and spoil all of our plans, of the new plans that I must make, that I *will* make." Mara looked at her closely. "You have not told him? You have obeyed us in this? He does not know who you are?"

"No; he thinks me one of the ladies of the Court. He has asked few questions. He has only loved me."

"You will tell him nothing, Natara. We must protect him, we must think of him now—I have only thought of you."

"I love him, Mara," Natara said softly. "You need not fear for him."

She sat quietly for a few moments, then, withdrawing herself from Mara's encircling arm, rose and left the courtyard.

Mara sat in brooding silence after Natara left, smoking one cigarette after another, her eyes dark and somber, her mouth a straight hard line. At last she rose and said :

"Amina, I am beaten to-night, but—I will not be beaten. I must think it over—I must have time. We will find a way—we *will*."

Then she left by the palace door.

XXXII

I followed Natara to her rooms. She sent her women away and we were alone. I could say nothing—I could do nothing. She did not seem to feel my presence. She threw herself upon her bed, her arms above her head, her eyes staring at the silken hangings above her. She was a child no longer, but a woman facing the great problem of her life, and, as all must do, facing it alone. I could not help her even with my great love.

XXXIII

The next day when the shadows began creeping over the marble traceries, Natara sent for her women. They did not know the sorrow that was tearing through her heart as she allowed herself to be bathed and perfumed and dressed in her most beautiful sari.

Pearls were twined about her throat, her arms and in her hair, and when she stood ready to meet her lover, she seemed a dream.

She came to me with a little caressing gesture and drew my face against hers, lightly brushing my cheek with her lips. I looked at her who was more to me than life. She was not the laughing girl who had gone down the pathway each evening, but a sad, sorrow-crowned woman who stood before me. Her pallid face was emotionless, her whole body tense, her being absorbed in this terrible thing that had come to her.

She went slowly down the pathway to the gate. She stood silently listening for his footsteps through the stillness, until at last the knock was heard, and the gate-keeper swung the great gate inward.

Neil entered in his boyish, eager way, and took Natara in his arms. She lay there quietly for a moment, then they came slowly up the path, Neil with his arm around Natara, her hand pressing his hand so that she might feel its warmth where it lightly touched her waist. They stopped to play a few moments with the peacock that fluttered to them, then mounted the stairway to the roof, Neil's favorite place.

The servants had arranged the cushions as usual near the corner of the balustrade. Neil threw himself down and drew Natara beside him.

"What do you think, Natara! I have to go to Bombay next week! The Resident is sending some very private messages to the Governor and he has chosen me to go for him. I'm awfully flattered that he

chose me instead of Captain Young, but—I hate to go. I will be away a week, and maybe longer. I hate to leave you, Natara, but—well, I am rather proud that I have been chosen, because the work is really very important. It shows that I am getting on."

Natara was silent and Neil looked at her curiously.

"Aren't you sorry, Natara? Why don't you say something?"

Natara was still silent, and Neil threw himself full-length on the silken cushions and laid his head in Natara's lap. Natara's fingers touched softly Neil's face and hair; then after a time she said:

"Neil, tell me about your work. About your people."

"What about them?" he asked.

"About your grandfather. He was Vice-roy in India at one time, was he not?"

"Yes," said Neil, with the reluctance of an Englishman to talk of himself or his family.



*MANDALAY has many images
along its roadsides to drive
away evil spirits.*

"And your father?" inquired Natara.

"Oh, he was Governor of Madras for a time," he answered.

"All of your people have been Indian officials, have they not?"

"Yes," said Neil.

"Tell me about it, Neil. Tell me about them."

Neil moved uncomfortably and drew to his lips the hand that was touching his hair. Then he answered:

"Well, there is nothing much to tell. We have all been here in India sort of from father to son. It is an understood thing that the men of our race will come out in India."

"And you—" she asked softly.

"Oh," and Neil laughed lightly, "I suffer the usual fate. I walk in father's footsteps. There is nothing else for me, and—and—it is a great thing, Natara, to be an official in India. We can do a lot of good, you know, we who have sort of inherited India and know her customs and traditions.

We understand her people much better than the man who is new on the job."

"You—you—like your work, Neil? You would not give up your career?"

Neil laughed again.

"Like it, Natara? I love it! I wouldn't be anything else for the world! Anyway, I couldn't. India is in our blood and we wouldn't be good for anything else. I couldn't imagine a future out of India. I feel that her people are my people, her land my land. It is part of me. Why—I don't even want to go home on leave. And as for living there, well—I just couldn't do it."

"If—if—you went home to live, what would you do in England?" asked Natara.

Neil was quiet for a moment, as if studying the problem placed before him. Then he said:

"I haven't the faintest idea. I'm good for nothing else but this life. I have been trained for it, educated for it. The only thing I have been taught regarding my

future is India. 'And it is a great future, Natara, and—and—I'm awfully ambitious, and—I want to make good. I don't want to fall down, well—for the family's sake, if for nothing else. They expect a lot from me—and I'm going to make good."

"They are proud of you?" asked Natara in a low voice.

Neil laughed an embarrassed laugh.

"All parents are proud of their sons," he said. "And I'm the only son, the last of the line, and they want me to go out in a blaze of glory. The Governor, well—he's a nice old Governor, and the Mater, she's like all mothers, thinks I'm the only boy in the world, and that there is no place too big for me if I only try for it. I'm sure she's got the cushions all planned for the Viceroy's chair I am to sit in one of these days."

"If you did not succeed, it would hurt them?"

"It would kill them, I think," he answered quickly. "But there is no chance

that I won't succeed. I have everything in my favor and I'm going to get to the top. I wouldn't disappoint them for the world."

Natara was quiet for a time, then she said:

"Neil, won't it hurt you if it is ever known that you love an Indian woman?"

A quick frown came over the boyish face. Natara did not know the long hours Neil had studied and worried over this problem. He knew India and he knew he was doing the forbidden thing. He knew that he should not have entered the garden. He had entered it lightly at first, expecting only a little romantic adventure. He had shut his eyes to the code of his class that he knew he was breaking. He was blinded by his great love. Whenever the thought thrust itself upon him that he was practically committing a crime in English eyes, especially the eyes of officialdom, he put it away. His case was different. Natara was different; she was not an ordinary woman.

And—he would not think of the future. He would just be happy, live in the present. This garden, this girl, this love, was beautiful. He would live in its present beauty. He would not think.

He did not answer for a time, and Natara studied his face anxiously. At last he said:

“Well—it is rather unusual—and perhaps—well, I might have a little trouble if it were known—but—well, let’s not talk about it. We’re happy now, let’s not think of disagreeable things. Where’s the music? Let’s just be happy to-night.”

“I told them not to sing to-night, not for a time. Do you want them?”

“Yes; have them far away so that we can just hear them. I like the music, it goes with the night and the palm-trees and you, Natara, the most beautiful sweetheart in the world.”

Natara spoke to one of the women crouching by the balustrade. She left, and

soon from the distance could be heard the liquid murmur of music rising and falling through the darkness of the night.

They listened to the music in silence. Neil brought Natara's face to his own, caressing her eyes, her lips, her soft neck. He buried his face in the shadows of her hair.

"You are the most beautiful thing, Natara. But—" and he held her face in his hands. "You have asked me a lot of questions about myself and my family. Now tell me, Natara, tell me about yourself."

Natara said:

"There is nothing to tell, Neil, except what I have told you. I am one of the ladies of the Court of the Princess. I am her namesake, and—and—I have her palace for a time."

"Yes, you are of good blood, one can see that," he said.

"I am of good family," she answered. "My people are Court people—that is all there is to tell."

Neil laughed. "I don't care who you are, Natara. I love you; I'd love you the same if you were a pariah."

Natara bent over him.

"Would you, Neil?" she asked eagerly.
"Would you?"

"Certainly, I would. Even if your father was the chief of the Thugs and your mother was a crossing-sweeper. I couldn't help it *now*. I love you, and I don't care a hang about your people."

"But, Neil, would you be willing to lose your position, your career for me?"

A frown came to Neil's face, and he hesitated.

"I'd hate to lose my position, I'd hate to disappoint my people, the old man would be heartbroken, and Mother—but I won't lose *you*, Natara. They wouldn't count if it came to losing you. You're just all to me. I'd give up everything and go to Sussex and raise pigs or calves or whatever they raise in Sussex rather than lose you. Oh, Natara!" and he drew her face to him

and looked into her eyes. "There's nothing else in the world but just *you*."

They were quiet for a time. Then he said, as if shaking off something that troubled him:

"Let's not think of careers nor the future nor anything but that we are together, and that this is the most beautiful world. Let's just love each other."

At last, at a sign from me, one of the women gave a soft clap of her hands and Natara knew that it was time Neil should go. She started at the slight sound, then she clasped Neil to her as if she would not let him leave her. She bent over him, half covering him with her rose-wrapped body.

"I cannot let thee go, I cannot!" she said in a low tone.

Neil looked at the distant slave resentfully.

"What does she mean by saying that I must go? I have just come!" he complained.

Natara laughed a little sadly.

“You say that each night, Neil.”

She looked into his face, as if to impress her memory with each line.

“Do you love me, Neil? Say it again. Say, ‘I love you, Natara, I love you.’”

Neil held her close to him.

“How can I tell you, Natara? I can only say I love you—love you—love you.”

Natara touched his face with her hands, caressed his eyes, traced the curve of his mouth with her finger-tips, and she said, as if to herself:

“Thy voice will always sound in my heart like the muffled sigh of the wind in the palm-trees, I shall feel forever the prison of thy dear arms.”

She held his face in her two hands and looked long into his eyes, her voice so low and tragic that Neil was involuntarily silenced.

“Look at me, Neil. Remember me. Remember my face, my hair, my hands, my voice. Do not forget me. I shall be near you always. On the straying moonbeams

I shall lie upon your bosom when you sleep. I shall be the ripples of the water when you bathe. I shall be the music unheard by others that throbs in your heart all day. When you are alone I shall sit by your side and whisper, and when you are in crowded chambers I will fence you about with aloofness."

Neil looked down at her curiously.

"Of course you will be with me always, dear one. Nothing can ever separate us. I am yours and you are mine."

Natara lay in his arms quietly, then she cried, with all the sorrow that was tearing through her heart, in her voice:

"Take me with you, Neil. Take me with you!"

She drew him to her fiercely.

"Take me with you, Neil. I cannot let you go."

Neil spoke to her lovingly, as he would to an impatient child.

"Some day, Natara. We'll plan it all out—some day—"



THE great clock-tower of Lucknow
seen through the palm trees.

Natara drew herself slowly from his arms.

"Yes, I understand, Neil. You must go now. Amina is impatient."

Neil reluctantly rose and they went down the stairway. As they came before the little temple, Natara hesitated for a moment, then said:

"Shall we lay the blossoms before Madan?" Then under her breath so Neil did not hear, "For the last time?"

Neil laughed and they entered the temple. From the heaped mass of fragrance before the god they took the white, waxy petals and formed a chain for Madan's neck, bracelets for his tiny arms, and anklets. Natara strewed the floor with the loosened petals. But there was no laughter in her voice, no play, as she urged Neil to bow before the tiny god.

"Just once, Neil. See, I touch his foot with my head. Just once."

"No," laughed Neil. "I will give him all the flowers he wants, but I won't bow

to him. You do the worship for the family, Natara."

Natara knelt for a moment in silence before her god, then they went from the palace down the pathway.

XXXIV

The next night when the setting sun was touching the distant hills with gold, eager, boyish steps came down the roadway and stopped at the usual place. He put out his hand to knock upon the gate—but there was no gate. Neil looked in amazement. The light whistle died upon his lips. There was nothing before him but a great blank wall.

He looked along the wall. Had he made a mistake? It could not be. There was no place in the world that he knew so well as this road leading to the western gate.

But there was no gate.

He stepped back and looked up at the

wall. There it was, a long, blank wall built of great stones, that looked as if it had been there for centuries. There was no opening, no sign that a gate had ever existed in its unbroken length.

Neil paced slowly back and forth. Then he encircled the place. He walked to the end of the wall, came back and went to the corner, turned and followed to the next corner, then paced down the third side of the enclosure.

There was no gate, nothing but great stones faced him. He could not understand it. He did not know that slaves had worked the entire night through, filling the gateway and that now there was no entrance to the garden by the lake except through the small door that led into the palace of the Rajah. The work had been well done. There was nothing to show that one part of the wall was not as old as the rest. It all had the same appearance, one stone was the same as another.

It seemed hours to Neil that he stood in

front of that frowning mass of masonry. Then he thought of the roof. He went hurriedly to a place on the road where he could see the roof. It was deserted. There were no forms to be seen above the balustrade.

In a daze, at last he turned away.

Day after day a haggard, frantic boy came down the roadway searching for the western gate. There was no sight nor sound from within the guarding wall. Nothing to show the heartbreak and sorrow that was within, as preparations were being hurried for the marriage of the Princess Royal.

Neil heard of the marriage, of the great durbar that was to be given, but it meant nothing to him. This other Natara, the Princess, did not interest him. Where was *his* Natara? He could ask no one, he could tell his trouble to no one. Had the past week been a dream?

He could not work, he could not eat, he

could not sleep. He passed from a healthy, happy boy into a man with tragedy in his eyes.

The Resident noticed his changed appearance, and, in the kindness of his heart, decided that a change was necessary. He was told that he should go to Bombay at once. There was nothing to do but obey.

The night before he left, watching slaves saw a figure in the moonlight, slowly pacing back and forth before what had once been a gate that led to a garden.

An enchanted garden of Dreams.

XXXV

I have told the story of my Princess. I have lived again those days and nights passed in the palace by the lake. Now when I am carried to the courtyard in the quiet of the evening, when even the birds have become silent, when the flowers are flinging their sweetness on the evening air

and the palms whisper and throw fan-like shadows across the marble, I return again to that past.

Vast and deep the night enfolds me and I drift away in dreams. I see the scroll of the past unrolled before me. I think of those first days when my Royal Mistress came as Queen to Naranabad. The world realized after a time that a great Queen ruled in India, ruled two kingdoms, that of her husband and that of Achmed.

Naranabad and Achmed lived for pleasure. More and more their days and nights were given up to the pursuit of pleasure. More and more without their knowledge the reins of their government were drawn into two kind hands that drove the chariots of State, and they were driven wisely and well. All India knew that from behind the purdah of Naranabad came justice, tempered always with mercy.

Her days were full. There was no Court in the Eastern world that was so magnificent. There were no audiences

granted to the women of both Oriental and Western lands that rivaled those of Natara, the Queen of Naranabad. But only I saw her through the long nights when she cried aloud in her sorrow, listening for a footstep through the darkness.

Natara, the girl, would have been content to sit still and drift in dreams back to the Kingdom of the Past, but I knew that dreams alone would never place within her hands the shell of forgetfulness. Yet she did not want to forget. When I would say to her, "Forget, Natara; it is your only path to happiness, to peace," she would cry:

"Forget? Never! If all the kingdoms of the world were offered me in exchange for my memories, I would laugh their gifts to scorn. I want remembrance, but I want it without pain."

I, who had been the cause of the sorrow of my Princess, tried to find another pathway to the door of happiness. She must not yield to the current of despair, she

must re-set the water-wheel of life. Natara must leave her girlhood. She must be a queen.

I gave her the example of her father's sorrow and how he filled his saddened days with work. I showed her her people, those simple, ignorant, helpless people, whose lives from their dawn to their setting are passed in little mud-baked villages. We searched for the child checked in its growth, the woman in her suffering—looked where the poor were pushed to the wall, the friendless forgotten—where the fallen were left to die and where the weak were oppressed by the strong, and there she sent her messengers.

From the women's quarters of a palace she sent laughter where before there were tears. I wanted her to cover the world with the shadow of her love. I wanted her to dream great dreams, to have great visions of what could be done in her kingdoms for the good, the happiness, of her subjects. We learned that though great

the thing a man dreams, it is not so great as are those dreams, and one might as well try to dip out the ocean with a shell as to stop entirely the sorrow caused by man's oppression of his fellow-man. Yet I console myself with the thought that a man's wishes should be the measure of him, not by what he achieves should he be judged, but by what he desires to achieve. In the striving to make those dreams come true is found the only royal road to happiness.

I, in my blindness, thought that love should be the birthright of my Princess, but the gods have touched mine eyes and I see more clearly. She was not to be given to a selfish love, sweet though it was, but love was given her to open a window of her heart. Only a man who has been hungry can be stung into sympathy with the hunger of others, a man who has known the grinding, crushing agony of poverty, can understand its pain. It is the same with sorrow. Only he who has felt the tearing of his own heart-strings, can touch

with understanding, kindly hands the quivering nerves of him who is in despair.

When her bowl of happiness was taken from her lips she thought that her day was ended; but life was made richer for countless thousands because of the love that was lost.

Natara loved, she suffered, she lost, but in the end she gained. Life is made up of experiences, not definitions. She lived, through others, perhaps, not through an active happiness of her own; for the torch of joy did not burn brightly in her own hands except to light men's lamps in shadowed homes and their rays shone across her darkened windows.



IN South India one finds rest canopies for travelers near the village.

XXXVI

Yet,—after all, when everything is ended, nothing is worth a wish save love. Love is life in all its fulness. Whether it brings joy or sorrow as its gift, its coming should be welcomed with open hands. It is the very flower of life, and the perfume of its presence will shed fragrance over the gray days long after the rose has faded.

Above the noise of the world, love's voice will linger in the heart, a never-ceasing song, calling softly, like the murmur of an Eastern river flowing gently to the sea.

EPILOGUE

EPILOGUE



NCE in after years, when snow had powdered the locks of Neil, he was sent to Naranabad to exact punishment for an uprising against the English power. The people of the North had in their madness, urged on by England's enemies, risen and burned and killed and looted, and England's answer had been swift and just.

When order was once more restored, she sent as messenger to demand indemnity and lives for the lives taken, her great Ambassador, Neil Thornton. England's terms were hard, and punishment would fall upon the innocent as well as the guilty.

Naranabad became panic-stricken, and, as usual, turned to his Queen for help in his time of trouble. It was she who must ask for mercy for his people.

The Ambassador was summoned to the

palace, and from behind a marble screen he heard a voice that for a moment caused the years to fall away and seemed to still the very beating of his heart. But it was only for a moment, and he was again the Ambassador demanding justice in the name of his King.

After he had stated the terms, there was silence. Then that voice which had haunted him all these years, said softly:

“I have been told, Your Excellency, that you passed your early years in India. Have you no remembrance that will cause you to soften your heart to the cries of its people?”

For a moment Neil could not speak as he listened to that low, passionate voice, and he half rose from his chair, his hands grasping its arms until the carved wood cut into his flesh.

“Who are you?” he said in a low, tense voice. “Who are you?”

“I am the Maharanee of Naranabad. But you do not answer my question,” the

low voice said. "I will ask it again. Has India's nights, with its thousand powers of scent and stars and gloom, no message for you? Will it not take you back to those swift, sweet years when you were young—those golden years with its starlight silence and dreams? Are there no times at twilight too heavy for memory? Have you no divine remembrance of some lost heaven?"

"When from some near-by village you hear the throbbing of a drum, the wistful wailing of a flute, now near, now softly distant, does not its plaintive wistfulness speak to your heart? Can you not see the palm-trees erect and slim against a golden sky, and hear as twilight closes the muezzin's mournful chant from the slim minarets half hidden amongst the flowering trees?"

There was silence for a moment, then the low voice continued:

"Do you never, in that cold, bleak home-land of yours, go to the window and instead of seeing the rain and the gray sky, see the sun setting red and gold over the

hills, the village clustering at the foot of the neem-trees, hear the temple bells call the women to their worship?

“They say you are as cold as the Tirah’s snows. Perhaps you have learned the secret bitterness of things, a sorrow that lies hidden from the world has touched your heart. If thy song has remained unsung, the rose ungathered, should it harden the heart? Has romance never come to you in all its jeweled state? Have you had no lovely dream that once was living truth? Have the breezes that stir among the tamarind-trees, that rustle through the jas-mine-flowers, no message for you? Is there no scent that you fear? Does not the magnolia-bloom speak to you from its waxy depth?”

Again there was silence, then:

“Have your blue eyes that conquer no remembrance of darker eyes that dream—eyes lit up by love—of scented, shady closes, where you kissed lips beneath the roses?

“Will you not let that which has been hidden in your heart as its desire speak for India? Will you not let the memory of those passionate days spent in this magic land call to you now when she pleads for her people?”

The face of the Ambassador was as white as the marble screen before which he sat. He could not speak, only stare at the delicate filigree, trying to pierce its secret. At last he said, in a voice, hoarse, drowned with emotion:

“Who are you—I demand to know—who are you?”

There was a rustle, as if some one rose from a seat, and the low tones answered, from a distance:

“I am the voice of India—asking for mercy.”

THE END

